

December 2015 Health Notes by Evelyn Ames

Health, Food and Color! Are There Connections?

Look around your abode. What colors do you see? The basic Red! Yellow! Blue! Green! Brown? Black? Orange? Do you think about the color of the tablecloth you use when hosting dinner guests? Are the colors in your bedroom conducive to sleep? The November 2, 1015 issue of *The New Yorker* triggered the idea for this December Health Notes. The main gist focused on Oxford University experimental psychology studies of how the brain integrates information from the five human senses to produce a coherent impression of reality. One of the researchers (Spence) argues “that in most cases at least half of our experience of food and drink is determined by the forgotten flavor senses of vision, sound, and touch.”

Various articles about color include the following descriptors relating to the major colors. One in particular specified that:

- RED makes us feel more energetic, outgoing and ready to move forward. It tends to attract attention. Action, strength, passion, drama, ferocity are feelings synonymous with this color.
 - ORANGE is stimulating. It encourages enthusiasm and zeal. Individuals who wear this color like to smile and to make others smile. It also encourages conversation and a sense of humor.
 - YELLOW encourages open-mindedness and attention to detail. This is a color often worn by intellectuals, the studious and those who like to be in positions of authority and control. It tends to generate optimistic qualities in those who wear it.
 - GREEN generates an atmosphere that is calm, soothing and balanced. Harmony and equilibrium are qualities of this color. Wearing this color reflects conventionality, security and an appreciation of nature.
 - TURQUOISE encourages clarity in thoughts, feelings, and communication. People who are drawn to wear this color have a refreshing and approachable personality. Youthfulness and sparkle resonate with this colors' special energy.
 - BLUE is a nonthreatening color and promotes values like loyalty and honesty. Those who wear this color reflect a wish for peace and quiet, and tranquility. Blue promotes trust and is a good color to wear if this is the quality you wish to inspire in your interactions.
 - PURPLE generates feelings of self-respect, dignity and self-worth. It is a royal color and is associated with the monarch, extravagance and wealth. People who choose to wear this color or to put it in their environments are drawn to its creative and spiritual qualities.
 - MAGENTA (PINK) is the color of compassion. It generates feelings of softness, gentleness, kindness, affection and love. Taking responsibility for your life and manifesting your dreams resonate with this color's energy.
- (Color Connections)*

Spence “found that a strawberry-flavored mousse tastes ten per cent sweeter when served from a white container rather than a black one; that coffee tastes nearly twice as intense but only two-thirds as sweet when it is drunk from a white mug rather than a clear glass one; that adding two and a half ounces to the weight of a plastic yogurt container makes the yogurt seem about twenty-five per cent more filling, and that bittersweet toffee tastes ten per cent more bitter if it is eaten while you’re listening to low-pitched music.” In 2011, Coca Cola issued a special white-colored can of Coke to raise funds for endangered polar bears. People complained because they thought the company had changed the formula. Not true. This illustrated the power of a package’s color and association to taste of contents. Spence’s lab has repeatedly shown that red, the usual color of a Coke can, is associated with sweetness.” In another experiment, participants thought salty popcorn was tasting sweet when it was served in a red bowl. When we see red fruit, we think of it as being riper and sweeter! Some studies show serving food on a blue plate makes it taste saltier.

“Americans derive a sizable proportion of their daily calories from food or drinks that are consumed directly from the package, and that is only expected to rise in tandem with the “snackification” of the Western diet. Marketing departments and product-design agencies have an extra incentive to enlist Spence’s findings in the cans, packets, tubs, and squeeze tubes that populate grocery-store shelves. We are accustomed to thinking of food and its packaging as distinct phenomena, but to a brain seeking flavor they seem to be one and the same.” Color consultants suggest red may prompt people to eat more! Orange is often used to promote food products and toys. Yellow is often associated with joy and happiness and energy. One may notice that green is used in advertising drugs. As people age, especially after seventy, their senses of taste and smell are lessened. Using red and blue colored serving dishes, plates, and cups/mugs may enhance their eating experiences and improve their intake of food! Red = sweeter! Blue = saltier!

As a caveat, Andrew Elliot and Markus Maier suggest that “little theoretical or empirical work has been conducted to date on the influence of color on psychological functioning, and the work that has been done has been driven mostly by practical concerns, not scientific rigor.”

Selected Resources: <http://www.colorconnections.com/emotional.html> <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/02/accounting-for-taste>
<http://psychology.about.com/od/sensationandperception/a/colorpsych.htm> <http://www.colour-affects.co.uk/psychological-properties-of-colours>
<http://www.webmd.com/women/home-health-and-safety-9/color-psychology> <http://www.color-wheel-pro.com/color-meaning.html>

Enjoy healthy and safe eating during the holiday season. Check November 2006 and January 2007 Health Notes (WWURA Health Notes) for detailed information on food poisoning.