

PSYCHOLOGY

Tired, Hot, and Thirsty

Recent studies, particularly those using brain imaging, have begun to probe the influence of emotional states, such as the dread that builds up in anticipation of a painful stimulus, on the calculation of preferences, such as choosing between an earlier, severe shock versus a later, milder one. Most of these experimental designs have manipulated high-level feelings (for instance, outrage at an unfair allocation) and concluded that there are

interactions between cognitive and emotional processing. Do low-level, visceral drives have a similar impact?

Nordgren *et al.* induced a state of fatigue in students by administering an effortful memory task and then asked them to attribute another student's incomplete test preparation, described in a

**Working up a thirst.**

vignette, to fatigue or to a lack of motivation. They found that fatigued subjects (referred to as being in a "hot" state in comparison to "cold" nontasked controls) were more likely to explain the actor's behavior as caused by fatigue and that this predilection persisted even when subjects were instructed to avoid letting their own tiredness influence their attribution. Atance and Meltzoff show that this inability to look beyond one's current visceral state can be revealed by asking children who have just eaten two dozen pretzel sticks whether they prefer water to more pretzels now (yes, they do) and also what they will want to have tomorrow—water, again, despite the strong preference of unfed subjects to choose pretzels both for today and for tomorrow. — GJC

Psychol Sci. 17, 635; 583 (2006).