

# Empathic Food Testing: How foods affect the way we feel

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**When we eat a food, we normally notice the smell and the taste, sometimes the feeling in the mouth, but we don't pay attention if there are effects beyond the sensual perception of smell and taste.**

Nevertheless, we are actually familiar with such effects of food that go deeper or last longer than the flavour. The awakening, stimulating (even nervous) effect of coffee, for example, an effect that is associated with caffeine. But tea also contains caffeine and also wakens us up, but in a completely different way to coffee. How can these differences be described? Or the relaxing, dampening effect of cream. On a closer look, such effects can be easily distinguished from repleteness, pleasure, joy or flavour. And they can be found in all foods. This means that foods contain a hidden property that has scarcely been noticed until now: their effect on our emotional and physical condition.

Science has begun to discover this topic. In consumer research,

the questioning of food-induced emotions has been gaining ground for some years now. Several questionnaires have been developed to record the emotional response after consumption.

For example, qualities such as warmth (as an inner experience) or a feeling of well-being are asked about in several tests. Research can therefore prove that these and other effect qualities occur and can be described by consumers. But it does not yet know what in the food triggers warmth or brightness in us.

Empathic Food Testing is a standardised method that has been scientifically developed as Wirkensorik® by Uwe Geier, a biodynamic researcher in Germany. It is used to determine the effect of foods on our physical and

emotional condition. It is a new way of assessing food quality and a new aspect of foods is discovered.

Getting familiar to the effect food has on our emotional and physical condition, we can develop competency on our own personal diet. This could be an aim to become independent from always following dietary rules that become boring after a while. We can learn to use food in certain situations or for certain conditions. If we want to enhance our attention and do brain work, we would hardly do it after eating a nice and big portion of meat with potatoes. The aim is to gain confidence in our perception of the physical and emotional effects of food. This ability helps us to judge which foods are good for us or not. This knowledge of the effects beyond the taste can also be utilised in a variety of ways in product development and marketing.

Even different types of water have a different effect spectrum. When tasting for example two different waters with a group of people it is always amazing that all of them can observe different emotional effects although it is only water, with the same appearance.

In other words, in Empathic Food Testing we observe the effect that occurs after the taste. It is a new way of assessing food quality. And it is a research method that visualises the influence of food on our psyche, our own emotional state, by establishing a personal and emotional connection to the object of research (the food). A connection that can obviously be objectified. We ourselves are the measuring instrument; a laboratory is not needed.

Getting into the right frame of mind before the exercise, will prepare



Empathic Food Test workshop with Uwe Geier at the February Agriculture Conference in Dornach.  
Photo credit: Section for Agriculture, Dornach.

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us for the observation. This can be a guided, imagined walk from head to toe and back again like a mental body scan. Directing awareness increases body alertness, relaxes and clears the mind. It is then easier to “delete” the taste perception and even the results of the effects are more reliable. Uwe Geier tested the influence of the mindful preparation before testing and could show its importance. In his experience, this significantly improves the ability to perceive. In other consumer research on food-induced emotions, participants are not prepared in this way. As a result, the observations remain on the surface, so to speak, in comparison with the Empathic Food Testing method.

### How to apply the method

How is it possible to get to know these little-known effects better? It is about exercise and collecting experience. Every person can actually do it. The way is through mindfulness.

### The process can be as follows:

- Take a few minutes of time. Sit down and relax. A gentle alertness in the body helps. This can be achieved in different ways, for example by doing a body walk as a kind of scan.
- Concentrate on your condition – this is the baseline.
- Taste the food, close your eyes and allow the flavour impression to pass through you - without paying much attention to it. We are used to describing the flavour. Instead, paying attention to the impressions that come after it is the art.
- Don't expect anything. Let yourself be surprised like a child and pay attention to what comes to you. These can be sensations or feelings.

The method has also proven its worth for product tests that are carried out in a standardised manner by groups of trained observers or consumers like a sensory test. For example, the effects of different

processing methods or recipes are assessed. Also, the emotional and physical effect of different foods like milk and vegan drinks in comparison can be tested.

Similar to a (taste) sensory expert test, the samples are tested using groups of either experienced observers or untrained consumers in larger number. Before starting, the testers are familiarised with the mindful body scan. With plenty of time and calm, food is then tasted and the effects on their own physical and emotional well-being observed. The results are on the one hand recorded in free form and secondly via a standardised questionnaire. This questionnaire contains 12 polar questions, such as “I feel light or heavy” or “I feel relaxed or nervous”. The results of the questionnaire can be statistically analysed, allowing product differences to be described.

In principle, empathic food testing can be used to supplement all questions on food quality. And it can shed new light on many questions about individual diets and effects of foods that go beyond nutrients.

We want to encourage consumers to trust their own perceptions more. This also strengthens the power

of judgement. And the relationship to what gives us vitality and health will change.

If you are interested in this method, we would recommend attending an introduction by a certified empathic food testing trainer. Contact details for trainers are publicly available: [www.wirksensorik.de/de/trainer](http://www.wirksensorik.de/de/trainer).

After this you can practise alone or in a group with others. Practising in a group has the advantage that you can discuss your experiences. If others in the group describe a similar effect, this reinforces confidence in the assessment. During the exercise you can find out how a food affects you and whether it does you good, or the opposite. This increases your food competence. Strengthening the relationship to yourself and to your own nutrition is a requirement for a positive effect in a healthy and sustainable food system.

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For more on Empathic Food Testing  
see: <https://www.wirksensorik.de/en>

