

2

All Candy Expo

Like a kid in a candy shop, she flitted from booth to booth. On her left there's a new candy bar to taste (nougat and caramel roll laid on a chocolate wafer) and on her right she's being asked to sample the new Jelly Belly flavors (Dog Food, Dirt, and Centipede). Every way she turns, there's something new and exciting to taste and investigate. It's fun walking through the All Candy Expo, no matter what your age.

The National Confectioners Association (NCA), a corporate sponsored trade group responsible for overseeing the interests of the confectionery industry, holds an enormous annual exposition of all things new in the candy world (now called the Sweets and Snacks Expo). Every year, candy manufacturers and distributors put on their prettiest faces (or hire the prettiest models) to hawk their products to the nation's retailers. Thousands of people come to walk the aisles of the Expo to see what's new.

Unfortunately, not just anyone can attend. Without an invitation, you can't get in. If you own a shop that sells candy, you're invited to this Expo as a buyer. Other than that, everyone else is excluded, except for a candy scientist and his wife. Even the deepest love for candy isn't enough to get you in. You have to be a buyer to go crazy at the All Candy Expo—and there's a good reason for that.

Everyone would love to go crazy in a candy expo!

And many people do. It's almost sad how some people lose it when exposed to such choices. Over the years, the people at NCA have had to change their policies regarding who could attend the Expo and what they could take away because of people's behavior. Children under 16 are no longer allowed in—their behavior,

goggle-eyed crazy in a candy shop, took away from the intended purpose.

It wasn't just kids, though, that caused problems. Many adults would also go nuts around so much candy. People would roll in luggage carts to fill up with free stuff. Exhibitors often have bowls of candy out for people to sample and these people would completely wipe out the bowl, pouring the contents into their travel bag. How rude—no consideration either for the exhibitor or the next person to come along. Supposedly, one person filled his bag up enough times to fill his station wagon—he took the candy back to his convenience store to sell. Not a bad profit, but at what expense.

To control the greedy nature of people, NCA then limited what bags were allowed into the Expo and, for a while, created a Candy Room to appease people's desires for free candy. Attendees would receive a standard bag as they entered the Candy Room and be allowed to fill it up once. You'd think a free bag of candy would satisfy people, but one bag full wasn't enough for some. Although it was only a few people who found ways to circumvent the rules, for example by building up the walls of the bag with cardboard so it would hold more, NCA finally had enough of people's greed and discontinued the Candy Room.

Expo attendees are now limited to one designated bag to collect samples and brochures and no wheelies allowed—the free candy grab is over.

Too many people just lose it when faced with free candy. They lack control. Or rather, they lose control.

For the most part, we learn to control our urges through the process of growing up. It's not unusual for a young kid to yell "Mine" when another kid tries to play with his toy, but parents generally teach their kids to share and control their selfish urges. Parents also teach their kids not to be gluttons, particularly with sweets and candy. In private, a kid may binge on candy until he gets sick, but at least in public, we grow up being taught to control our inner urges. And those urges for sweets seem to be one of the stronger temptations we face.

But each person is different and we each fall prey to our own temptations. Take, for example, a box of chocolates. Some people can restrict themselves to one piece per night. These people can enjoy the taste of a chocolate and then put the rest of the box aside, knowing it will be there the next night. Seriously, there really are such people—saints. Most of us would go back for another (and maybe even another). Once the taste is in your mouth, it's difficult to stop. Some people have so little control, they'd eat the entire box at one sitting, and then usually regret it.

For what it's worth, if you really want to stop at one chocolate, consider brushing your teeth immediately after that first one. Removing the chocolate taste in your mouth removes the temptation to take another one. Besides, chocolates (and many other things) taste terrible with a toothpaste mouth.

Consider the Marshmallow Experiment. An experimenter and a four-year-old are together in a room. The experimenter says, "You can either have one marshmallow right away or, if you wait 15 minutes, you can have two." He then leaves the room, leaving the four-year-old alone with the marshmallow (and a camera). Imagine the agony. Not surprisingly, some kids succumbed—better one marshmallow now than two later. Others found ways to pretend it wasn't there or had enough self-control to delay gratification for a larger reward. The research found that those children who have the patience to wait are often happier and healthier adults (lower body weight, higher SAT scores, and, in general, significantly more confident) than those who ate the marshmallow right away. The marshmallow test was even a better indicator of future success than socio-economic factors. Marshmallows can tell the future.

As a kid, I'm not sure if I could have waited 15 minutes for a second marshmallow. I was the typical candy fiend, saving money to buy candy, always trying to get the best value for my money (3 Musketeers are really big for their weight and appeared to go a lot farther than the more dense Snickers Bar). Still, it was only a marshmallow; I think I could probably have lasted 15 minutes.

Nowadays, with candy all around me, I can afford to be extremely picky and eat candy sparingly (which, along with lots of cycling miles, helps keep the spare tire at bay as well). People marvel at how I can have candy all around without craving it, but it's probably like anything—you get saturated with it and no longer feel the need all the time.

Still, there's a sense of wonder walking around the All Candy Expo, looking at all the new candies appearing on the market. Although I don't have that same amazement as my wife, there's something really cool about being inside the candy industry and being exposed to all the new sweets.



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Candy Bites

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Hartel, R.W.; Hartel, A.

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