I HAVE been in the US for less than 24 hours when, against my better judgement, I decide to indulge in a food trend I have heard about from the other side of the pond: ice cream so low in calories that the marketing message encourages you to eat the whole tub in one go.

For an ice cream addict, the promise was irresistible. Still, I know bingeing on any junk food – however low in calories – is unwise, and when I arrive at New York University to meet with Marion Nestle a few days later, I am unsure whether to mention my transgression.

For an ice cream addict, the promise was irresistible. Still, I know bingeing on any junk food – however low in calories – is unwise, and when I arrive at New York University to meet with Marion Nestle a few days later, I am unsure whether to mention my transgression. After all, as the doyenne of nutritional science, she has spent much of her career taking on the food industry and its unhealthy messages.

Trained in microbiology, Nestle was

**Food fighter**

Marion Nestle has been fighting food industry giants for decades. Now, she tells Catherine de Lange, she wants to expose the way they skew scientific research.
Finding favour

When industry funds research into food and health, the results are more likely to come out in its favour.

### Industry funded vs. Non-industry funded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry funded study conclusions</th>
<th>Non-industry funded study conclusions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfavourable</td>
<td>Unfavourable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Favourable</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Positive associations**

No positive association

**Negative associations**

### Positive associations

A link between obesity and soda consumption rarely appears in industry-funded studies.

### Negative associations

**Obesity findings**

Positive association

No positive association

10

5

2

1

Fat, even if you are taking in flavanols too.

### Financed by

Nestle

### Conclusion

The subject takes her back to food and confectionery politics: "I had never really thought about it. I was really tired of going to meetings on nutrition study conclusions. It focused on the beneficial effects of the flavanols found in dark chocolate or the odd glass of wine. Often scientists end up publishing research that pushes unhealthy messages for the food industry. It is hard to get her work accepted in journals. It is also aimed at the general public. And I think back to all the times telling us it is a good idea to eat fat, possibly. I don't think she thinks our relationship with food is broken.

In 2015, Nestle was quoted in an article in *The New York Times* about the leaked emails. She got about 30 calls from reporters in the week afterwards. They were shocked. "They could not believe that Coca-Cola would fund research that's self-serving. They could not believe that academics at respectable institutions would accept Coca-Cola money for such a purpose, and they couldn't believe that the universities would allow their faculty to do that. So I thought – these are researchers, and they don't know?" she says indignantly. "They have no idea how this system works. I've got another book."" I think back to all the times *New Scientist* has run articles about the benefits of chocolate or the odd glass of wine. Often the research is sound. But if you eat a bar of chocolate you are mostly eating sugar and

### Fat, even if you are taking in flavanols too.

**Food is pushed at people in such an overwhelming way and it's done so skillfully**

"Food is pushed at people in such an overwhelming way and it's done so skillfully" and sugar than it is to talk about dietetic and lifestyle patterns as a whole." This reminds me of the mixed messages on my Twitter feed. What can you possibly do when you are trying to be healthy you can overeat. When I mention it to Nestle, her face lights up. "There was a pop-up store in the neighbourhood here that was selling raw cookie dough," Intrigued, she tried some. "It was just weird. It wasn't that good. And one day I walked by and there was a long block for this place. They were buying it in tubs!" She seems horrified, so I ask whether she thinks this relates to the debate about obesity. "I think a lot of people have a very disordered relationship with food but that’s because it’s pushed at people in such an overwhelming way and it’s done so skillfully," she says. Has her work had an influence on how she eats? “No,” she says. “I’ve always liked vegetables, so I’ve never had a problem with that. I love to eat, I eat what I like, I just try not to eat too much.” That message might not have the allure of headlines telling us it is a good idea to consume chocolate and red wine. But if there is one thing Nestle's work tells us it is that it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Sin-free ice cream included.

Catherine de Lange is *New Scientist*'s deputy features editor.