

The key to a healthy lifestyle is in the mind

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The main factors influencing the amount of physical exercise people carry out are their self-perceived ability and the extent of their desire to exercise. A study of 5167 Canadians, reported in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*, has shown that psychological concerns are the most important barriers to an active lifestyle.

Sai Yi Pan, from the Public Health Agency of Canada, led a team of researchers who carried out a study which examined data from a nationwide series of telephone interviews. She said "Our findings highlight the need for health promotion programs to enhance people's confidence and motivation, as well as providing education on the health benefits of physical activity".

One interview question asked participants how confident they were that they could regularly do a total of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (PA) three or four times a week and a total of 60 minutes of light PA each day. This 'self-efficacy' score was consistently found to be related to higher PA across gender, age group, education level and family income level. According to the authors, "Confidence in one's personal ability to carry out exercise plays a central role in the direction, intensity and persistence of health-behavior change. People who have higher PA self-efficacy will perceive fewer barriers to PA, or be less influenced by them, and will be more likely to enjoy PA".

Likewise, participants were asked to what extent they intended to be physically active over the next six months. This 'intention score' was another important independent correlate of physical activity.

The strong effects of self-efficacy and intention on PA suggest that interventions designed to increase PA should target these factors. The authors conclude that, "Future research is needed to identify how those influences can be optimally incorporated into interventions that will increase people's belief in their ability and motivation/intention to be physically active".

Citation: Individual, Social Environmental, and Physical Environmental Correlates with Physical Activity among Canadians: a Cross-sectional Study, Sai Yi Pan, Christine Cameron, Marie DesMeules, Howard Morrison, Cora LYNN Craig and Xiaohong Jiang, *BMC Public Health* (in press)

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