

The rewards of doing 'something'

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just as long as they are doing something. That's one of the findings summarized in a new review article published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

When [psychologists](#) think about why people do what they do, they tend to look for specific goals, attitudes, and motivations. But they may be missing something more general - people like to be doing something. These broader goals, to be active or inactive, may have a big impact on how they spend their time.

Author Dolores Albarracín of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign says she started [paying attention](#) to people's different levels of activity in various countries and saw how much busier people are in the US relative to other areas. "People have this inclination to do more, even if what they do is trivial," she says. In recent years, she has been doing research on how people feel about activity, including how easily she could change the level of activity that people aimed for. In one set of experiments, for example, she found that getting people to think about [physical activity](#) made them more interested in political activity. Albarracín co-wrote the review article with Justin Hepler and Melanie Tannenbaum, also of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Experiments have shown that the desire for activity is quite strong; people will go to a lot of trouble to maintain their desired level of activity, which can include [unhealthy behaviors](#). Many psychologists have "the idea that people have these highly specific goals," Albarracín

says. "But quite often some significant proportion of our time is engaged in this global level—we want to do something, but what we do ends up not mattering much. You could end up with productive behavior, like work, or impulsive behavior, like drug use."

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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