

Rebranding exercise: 'Quality of life' a better motivator than 'Live longer'

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(Medical Xpress) -- A new University of Michigan study finds that the most convincing exercise message emphasizes immediate benefits that enhance daily quality of life.

Health care, business and [public health](#) have presumed that promoting health and longevity benefits from exercise will motivate people to exercise. The new findings, however, indicate that these individuals exercised less than those who aimed to enhance the quality of their daily lives.

"The study showed that what an individual espouses as important does not necessarily translate into behavior," said Michelle Segar, research investigator for the U-M Institute for Research on Women and Gender. "While people say they value health and healthy aging, those distant benefits don't make exercise compelling enough to fit into their busy lives."

These findings challenge the current convention of promoting exercise for [better health](#), [longevity](#), or as medicine.

"Promoting exercise for health is logical, but people's daily decisions are more often connected to emotion than logic," Segar said. "A more effective 'hook' is to rebrand exercise to emphasize the immediate benefits that enrich daily living, such as [stress reduction](#) and increased vitality."

Individuals may also appreciate the subsequent benefits that make exercise more personally meaningful, such as being a patient parent, enjoying life, being creative and having focus at work, she says.

"By shifting our model from medicine to marketing, we can improve how we 'sell' exercise to the public by using principles like branding," Segar said.

For example, messages about immediate rewards from exercise that make life more enjoyable, such as "move more, get energy," may better motivate busy individuals than promotions focused on achieving distant and abstract benefits, such as "move more, get healthy."

Segar studied responses from 226 women between the ages of 40 to 60 who worked full time. They completed three surveys during a one-year period. [Respondents](#) were asked about their exercise goals and participation, how much they valued their goals, body mass index (BMI) and social support. This study supports other research showing that the reasons why individuals initiate exercise influence their motivation and behavioral sustainability.

Segar recommends four steps to rebrand exercise and to improve engagement and participation:

- Assess the specific exercise benefits your organization has been promoting.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these motives to engage and motivate ongoing participation.
- Ask your target population what values and experiences they most care about achieving in their daily life that [exercise](#) benefits would impact, such as reduced stress and improved mood.

- Develop new messaging that addresses these valued end points.

Caroline Richardson, an associate professor of family medicine at U-M and research scientist at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, and Jacquelynne Eccles, a professor of psychology and education, co-authored the study.

More information: The findings appear in the latest issue of *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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