

Positive mindset influences health decisions

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(Medical Xpress)—An analysis of the personality types, diet and exercise habits of more than 7,000 people has shown that a positive attitude, and the belief that you can determine your life's outcomes, leads people to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Victoria University economist Dr Stefanie Schurer and colleagues from the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research last year used data from the Australian Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey to learn more about why people choose to lead healthy lives.

Dr Schurer says that economists traditionally believe behaviour can be changed by giving people more information, education or [financial incentives](#) to enable a rational decision to be made, but the group's research showed that to increase the uptake of healthy behaviours in a population you would need to address people's beliefs and perceptions first.

"The results of our analysis showed that individuals who identified that they believe their actions have an impact on the outcomes of their lives made healthier choices. They exercised more regularly, ate breakfast regularly, had a better diet generally, and were less likely to smoke."

The results also indicated that men and women had notably different reasons for making these choices.

"The majority of men who believed they could change outcomes in their

lives and invested in their health did so because they believed they would enjoy better health in the future. Whereas women who also had a [positive attitude](#) and invested in their health generally did so because they simply enjoy these activities," says Dr Schurer.

The discussion paper was published by the University of Melbourne in the Melbourne Institute Working Paper Series in August 2012.

Dr Schurer says the difficulty for [public health officials](#) managing issues such as obesity is compounded by the results of another of her studies, which indicated belief systems are fairly stable in adulthood, even if individuals experience dramatic life events such as a serious health shock.

Provided by Victoria University

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