

# I will if you will: What motivates spouses to get fit, manage illness

February 5 2013, by Amy Patterson Neubert

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(Medical Xpress)—Before spouses take their first step toward fitness, their partner's interest or willingness to participate can sway them, says a Purdue University family studies expert.

"Marriage commitments focus on a couple's devotion in either a state of sickness or in health, but it's also about the in between - a person's readiness to change for [better health](#)," says Melissa M. Franks, an assistant professor of human development and family studies. "Married people are likely to engage in similar [health behaviors](#) and, in general, a married person's [lifestyle choices](#) can directly and indirectly influence their partners. So what happens, when one just person is ready to change?"

Franks, who studies marriage and [chronic illness](#) management, says people often focus on the action: what a person is doing to lose weight or get fit. But, she says, it's also important to consider whether individuals are thinking about change and how spouses influence each other in early stages of change.

"If I'm trying to change, and you are not with me, that may affect my process and ability to change," says Franks who has studied [married couples](#) with [Type 2 diabetes](#) and spouses who participate in worksite wellness programs. "Our research suggests that partners realize one other's willingness to make a change - even if they haven't talked about it with their spouse. The other's position affects their confidence to change."

Franks says there are some patterns based on gender. For example, in one of her studies, a husband feels less confident about losing weight if his wife is not as ready to lose weight. But, the husbands' confidence about getting more exercise was not associated with what their wives were thinking.

"However, a husband's readiness to change was associated more consistently with his wife's confidence," says Franks, who also is affiliated with Purdue's Center on Aging and the Life Course and Regenstrief Center for Healthcare Engineering. "Women tend to be the family's gatekeeper on health issues, so we speculate that women may be more aware if the husband is ready to make changes."

Provided by Purdue University

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