

Contemplation increases willingness to follow up with the doctor

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Some studies of at-risk populations suggest that up to half of the people tested for HIV never return to the doctor's office to find out their test results. While many of these people may simply forget to return or deem the results unimportant, it is likely that a portion of people don't return because they don't want to know the results.

In three studies, Jennifer Howell and James Shepperd of the University of Florida investigated whether prompting people to contemplate their reasons for seeking and avoiding the [health information](#) would make them more willing to receive their medical results.

The results of these experiments are published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

Participants filled out a motives questionnaire intended to make them think thoroughly about the reasons underlying their decision to seek or avoid their results. Questions included: "Learning that I am at high risk for diabetes would be distressing," or "I would regret not learning my risk for diabetes."

All participants also filled out a [diabetes risk](#) calculator and received the opportunity to learn their risk. Those who filled out the motives questionnaire before deciding whether to learn their risk were more likely to choose to see their results than those who filled it out after deciding whether to learn their risk. The same trend emerged when participants generated their own reasons for seeking or avoiding their

risk for [cardiovascular disease](#). Together, these two studies suggest that prompting people to contemplate their reasons for seeking or avoiding health information makes them more likely to seek out information about their own [health risks](#).

But it turns out that this effect was only applicable for conditions that are treatable. In the last experiment, some participants were told that TAA deficiency—a made-up condition—was treatable, and some were told it was not. Contemplation made participants more likely to seek out their test results when they thought the condition was treatable, but not when they thought it was an untreatable disease.

As medical treatments become more advanced, early detection and intervention will become increasingly important. Simply asking patients to contemplate the reasons they would seek or avoid their screening results may make them more likely to follow up with their doctor, thus reducing the public health burden.

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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