

New research finds 'mind over matter' key to a healthy lifestyle

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People who want to increase their participation in regular exercise and adopt a healthier lifestyle may be best to mentally visualise it, new research by Curtin University has found.

The research, published in the leading journal *Health Psychology*, found

that 'mental imagery interventions', or visualising an activity or task, may be effective in helping people change their behaviours, including moderating alcohol consumption and participating in [regular physical activity](#).

Lead Australian author John Curtin Distinguished Professor Martin Hagger, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University, said the research aimed to explore the link between visualisation and increasing healthy [behaviour](#).

"There are strong links between chronic illnesses like heart disease and diabetes and behaviour, and imagery-based interventions offer an inexpensive, effective way of promoting healthy behaviours such as [physical activity](#) and healthy eating," Professor Hagger said.

"We found that people who simply visualised the steps necessary to do the healthy behaviour on a regular basis were more likely to be motivated, and actually do, the healthy behaviour."

Mental imagery was also more effective in promoting healthy behaviours when the visualisation lasted longer, when people were reminded to do their imagery by text message, and when the person was given detailed instructions on how to conduct the imagery exercise.

Professor Hagger explained that the research could have important implications for health professionals and the broader community around the world.

"Previous studies have shown that imagery interventions have been used in various contexts including enhancing athletes' performance, flight simulation training for aircraft pilots and for symptom relief in hospital settings. Our research shows that imagery is also effective for promoting participation in healthy behaviours," Professor Hagger said.

"Our findings may not only be of interest to [health professionals](#) around the world, but could be of interest and potentially implemented within other industries."

More information: Dominic Conroy et al. Imagery interventions in health behavior: A meta-analysis., *Health Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1037/hea0000625](#)

Provided by Curtin University

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