

# Illness-and death-related messages found to be significant motivators for exercise

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Fitness apps that emphasize illness- or death-related messaging are more likely to be effective in motivating participation than are social stigma, obesity, or financial cost messaging, according to a recent study.

Previous studies, especially on smoking cessation and risky sexual behavior, found that messages related to mortality could be a barrier to

acknowledging [health risks](#), but the study found this is the opposite for fitness apps.

The study asked 669 research participants to indicate how persuasive these five types of messages were in terms of motivating them to work out at home with a fitness app, to uncover their effectiveness, connection with social-cognitive beliefs such as [self-regulation](#) (goal setting), self-efficacy and outcome expectation, and seeing what role male/female gender played.

"I did not expect only illness- and death-related messages to be significant and motivational," said Kiemute Oyibo, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Waterloo's School of Public Health Sciences. "Not only were illness- and death-related messages motivational, they had a [significant relationship](#) with self-regulatory belief and outcome expectation, and there was no significant difference between males and females."

Oyibo said he had expected obesity-related messages (such as "one in four Canadians has clinical obesity") to be motivational and have a significant relationship with self-regulatory belief, given that obesity is associated with the leading causes of global mortality.

"This study is important because it helps us—especially designers of [health](#) apps—understand the types of messages that individuals, regardless of gender, are likely to be motivated by in persuasive health communication, and that are likely to influence individuals' social-cognitive beliefs about exercise," Oyibo said.

Oyibo said future studies should consider other demographic characteristics besides gender, such as age, culture, race and education, to uncover the role they play in persuasive health communication.

The study, "The Relationship between Perceived Health Message Motivation and Social Cognitive Beliefs in Persuasive Health Communication", was published in MDPI. It was authored by Oyibo, with Julita Vassileva, a Persuasive System Design professor at the University of Saskatchewan, assisting with the data collection.

**More information:** Kiemute Oyibo, The Relationship between Perceived Health Message Motivation and Social Cognitive Beliefs in Persuasive Health Communication, *Information* (2021). [DOI: 10.3390/info12090350](https://doi.org/10.3390/info12090350)

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