

Positive memories of exercise spur future workouts

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Getting motivated to exercise can be a challenge, but new research from the University of New Hampshire shows that simply remembering a positive memory about exercise may be just what it takes to get on the treadmill. This is the first study to explore how positive memories can influence future workouts.

"This study underscores the power of memory's directive influence in a new domain with practical applications: [exercise](#) behaviors. These results provide the first experimental evidence that [autobiographical memory](#) activation can be an effective tool in motivating individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles," researchers Mathew Biondolillo, a doctoral student in psychology at UNH, and David Pillemer, Dr. Samuel E. Paul Professor of Developmental Psychology at UNH wrote.

The new research is presented in the recent article "Using memories to motivate future behavior: An experimental exercise intervention," in the journal *Memory*.

The researchers examined the effects of remembering past exercise experience on college students' subsequent exercise intentions and behaviors. Researchers asked about 150 students to recall either a positive or negative memory that would increase their motivation to exercise; other students were not asked to recall a motivational memory (the [control group](#)). The researchers then surveyed the students one week later to see if they reported an increase in exercise.

The researchers found that students who remembered a positive exercise memory reported significantly higher levels of subsequent exercise than those who were not asked to recall a memory about exercise. The researchers also found that [students](#) who were asked to recall a negative exercise memory also reported exercising more than the control group, although less than the

group that recalled a positive exercise memory.

"Without explicit direction or encouragement, our sample of [college students](#), amidst the innumerable distractions afforded by life at a large, public university, increased their reported exercise activities from their habitual levels," the researchers said.

"From a public health perspective, identifying factors that can motivate individuals to engage in [regular exercise](#) is vital," they said.

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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