“When I eat healthily it is easier for me to be physically active”:
The role of transfer and compensatory health cognitions in health behavior change

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Background

- To maximize health benefits, health behaviors should be changed in concert
- Investigating cross-behavior cognitions can help to understand interrelations between different health behaviors and mechanisms of changing more than one behavior:

  - **Compensatory health cognitions** are defined as cognitions that the negative consequences of unhealthy behaviours can be compensated for by engaging in healthy behaviour (Knäuper et al., 2004; Radtke et al., 2013)

  - **Transfer cognitions** describe cognitions that the ability (e.g., being physically active) in 1 domain supports an increase of healthy behavior in another domain (e.g., adopting a healthy diet)

Research Questions

What role do cross-behavior cognitions play ...
... in motivating individuals to be physically active and ...
... in facilitating the use of self-regulatory strategies?

Theoretical framework:

[Diagram showing the theoretical framework involving behavior-specific cognitions, cross-behavior cognitions, and physical activity]

Online Setting

**Design and Sample**

- T1 T2
- n = 92 adults
- N = 132 adults
- Age M = 44 years
- 65.2 % female

**Behavior-specific variables**

- Intention (Lippke et al., 2009)
- Self-efficacy (Schulz et al., 2009)
- Planning (Lippke et al., 2004)
- Satisfaction (Baldwin et al. 2009; Fleig et al., 2011a,b)
- Physical activity (Craig et al., 2003)

**Cross-behavior cognitions**

- As long as I eat several portions of fruit and vegetable each day ...
- Compensatory health cognitions (adapted from Knäuper et al., 2004)
  ... it’s ok to not exercise regularly.
- Transfer cognitions (Fleig et al., in prep)
  ... it is easier for me to be physically active.
  ... I am more motivated to exercise.

**Analyses**

- Manifest path analyses
- with Mplus

Results

[Path diagram showing the relationships between motivation, volition, self-efficacy, satisfaction, transfer cognitions, compensatory cognitions, intention, planning, and physical activity]

Over and above behavior-specific cognitions, compensatory cognitions predicted intentions to exercise: The higher the level of compensatory cognitions, the lower the intention to be physically active.

Over and above behavior-specific cognitions, transfer cognitions predicted planning and changes in physical activity: The higher the level of transfer cognitions, the higher the level of planning and physical activity.

Discussion

- Compensatory health cognitions play a role in the motivational phase of health behavior change
- Compared to compensatory health cognitions, transfer cognitions are more strongly associated with actual behavior change
- Cross-behavior cognitions can be addressed in tailored lifestyle interventions

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