"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)

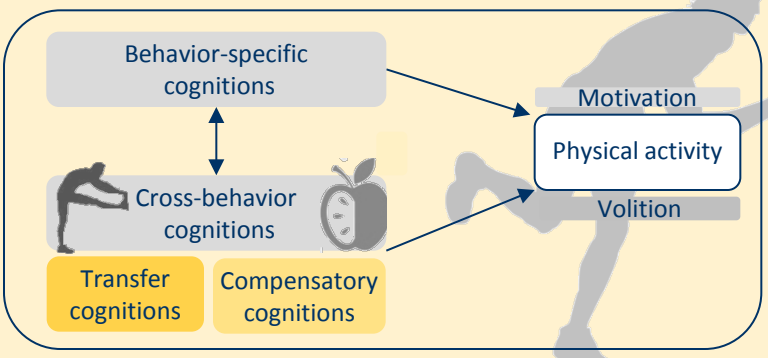
Transfer cognitions describe cognitions that the ability (e.g., being physically active) in 1 domain supports an increase of healthy behavior in another domain (e.g., adopting a healthy diet)

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:



Online Setting

Design and Sample

N = 132 adults
Age *M* = 44 years
65.2 % female

n = 92

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 …

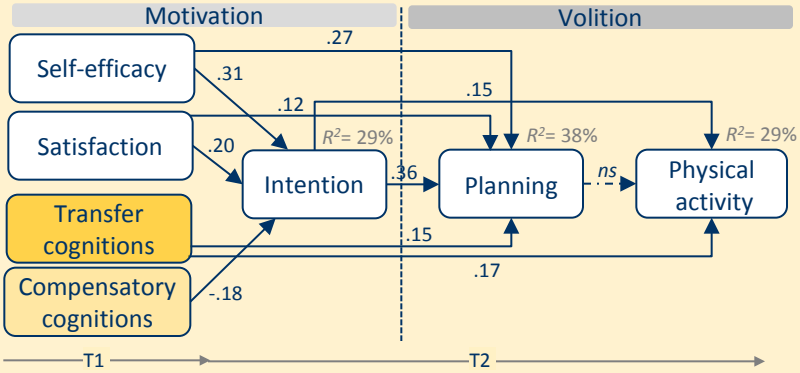
Compensatory health cognitions (adapted from Knäuper et al., 2004)
… it's ok to not exercise regularly.

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



Note. Control variables: sex, number of chronic conditions, age, baseline activity, intervention group.

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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