Changing Health Behaviors to Avoid Environmental Exposures

Susan Buchanan, MD, MPH
Great Lakes Center for Children’s Environmental Health/Region 5 PEHSU
University of Illinois at Chicago
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Objectives

• Describe three health behavior change approaches

• Employ techniques in health messaging that will increase likelihood of behavior change

• List examples of health behavior change messages that may decrease exposure to environmental contaminants
TAKE NOTES!
Behavior change messages in environmental health

- Eat low mercury fish 2-3 times a week
- Have your children screened for lead
- Use fewer pesticides
- Get your well-water tested
- Don’t microwave food in plastic containers
- Damp mop and damp dust frequently to keep contaminants in house dust down
Approaches to Behavior Change
Herbert Simon, Nobel Prize in Economics 1978: people do the best they can to make decisions given constraints

- Our “constraints” are consistent and predictable

Previous assumptions about human behavior:

- People act rationally
- People make decisions that are in their best interest
- Knowledge and information drive behavior

Moses J. Get action instead of indifference: Using behavioral economics insights to deliver benefits messages. Benefits Quarterly, Third Quarter 2013
Kelly MP, Barker M. Why is changing health-related behavior so difficult? Pub Health 2016.
Behavioral Economics – Framing

Highlight the gain or loss resulting from the action/inaction

Loss framing

“Stop losing money! Use a health expense account”

vs.

“Start saving money! Use a health expense account”

Losing hurts worse than winning feels good

Gain framing

Using survival rates vs. mortality rates of a surgical procedure

Moses J. Get action instead of indifference: Using behavioral economics insights to deliver benefits messages Benefits Quarterly, Third Quarter 2013
Behavioral Economics – Framing

**Gain**
- Set a good example for your daughter and get a mammogram.
- This insurance plan provides medical coverage and health savings account

**Loss**
- Your family needs you now... and later. Get a mammogram.
- Are you really going to pass up the $500 bonus?

Moses J. Get action instead of indifference: Using behavioral economics insights to deliver benefits messages Benefits Quarterly, Third Quarter 2013
The most fundamental issue in educational interventions is the selection of the most appropriate theory or model upon which the intervention will be based.
Behavior change models

- Social cognition models (beliefs and attitudes)
  - Health belief model
  - Theory of planned behavior
  - Self-efficacy

- Stage models

Sutton S. Health Behavior: Psychosocial Theories. 2002
Health Belief Model

- Perceived susceptibility/vulnerability to a condition
- Perceived severity of the condition
- Perceived benefits of taking action to prevent the condition
- Perceived barriers to effective action

Sutton S. Health Behavior: Psychosocial Theories. 2002
Health Belief Model

**INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS**

- Perceived susceptibility and seriousness of the health threat

**MODIFYING FACTORS**

- Age, sex, ethnicity, personality, socio-economic status and knowledge

**LIKELIHOOD OF ACTION**

- Perceived benefits versus barriers to behavioral change

- Likelihood of behavioral change

**Cues to action:**
- Education
- Symptoms
- Media information
A person’s *intent* to perform the behavior is the best predictor of that behavior

- Intent is affected by:
  - Attitude towards the behavior
  - Subjective norm (social pressure for/against)

- Self-efficacy – perceived behavioral control
Beliefs, Attitudes and Subjective Norms are informed by:

- Interaction with others
- Media messages
- Culture
- Religion
- Gender
- Personality
Theory of Planned Behavior

- Behavioral beliefs
- Evaluation of behavioral outcomes
- Normative beliefs
- Motivation to comply
- Control beliefs
- Perceived power

- Attitude toward (new) health behavior
- Subjective norms
- Behavioral intention
- Behavior change

Perceived behavioral control (self-efficacy)
Perceived self-efficacy – “an individual’s level of confidence in his or her own skills and persistence to accomplish a desired goal”

Before delivering the message…

Assessing intent:
- How likely is it that you will…
- I expect to…

Assessing attitude:
- It’s good to…
- It will be beneficial to …

Before delivering the message…

Assessing subjective norms:
- My family will support me…
- I have friends who also…

Assessing self-efficacy
- I am confident I can…
- It will be easy for me to…

Investigating obesity risk-reduction behaviors and psychosocial factors in Chinese Americans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Questionnaire statements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Psychosocial statements – Health Belief Model</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived benefits</td>
<td>Limiting my intake of high-calorie soft drinks and juice will lower my likelihood of becoming obese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived barriers</td>
<td>I find it hard to prepare home-cooked meals due to lack of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived susceptibility</td>
<td>I may develop obesity because of my sedentary lifestyle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived severity</td>
<td>If I gain excessive weight, my health would be in serious danger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cues to action</td>
<td>Health segments on television or radio are a reminder that I should watch my weight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>How confident are you in consuming small portion sizes of food?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Psychosocial statements – Theory of Planned Behaviour</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural intention</td>
<td>During the upcoming week, I plan to choose smaller portion sizes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>Choosing home-cooked meals instead of restaurant-prepared foods is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative beliefs</td>
<td>My parents encourage me to eat a lot of food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to comply</td>
<td>I usually follow my parents’ opinions on dietary matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived behavioural control</td>
<td>As long as I want to, I can prevent myself from gaining excessive weight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1 Examples of questionnaire items

Published in: Doreen Liou; Kathleen Bauer; Yeon Bai; *Perspect Public Health* 134, 321-330.
DOI: 10.1177/1757913913486874
Copyright © 2013 Royal Society for Public Health
Figure 1 Chinese American model for obesity prevention

Published in: Doreen Liou; Kathleen Bauer; Yeon Bai; *Perspect Public Health* 134, 321-330.
DOI: 10.1177/1757913913486874
Copyright © 2013 Royal Society for Public Health
An Integrative Model of Behavior Prediction

Distal Variables
- Demographics
- Culture
- Attitudes Towards Them (stereotypes, stigma)
- Personality and Emotions
- Other Individual Variables (perceived risk, sensation-seeking)
- Exposure to Media and Other Interventions

Behavioral Beliefs and Outcome Valuations

Normative Beliefs and Motivation to Comply

Efficacy Beliefs

Attitude

Perceived Norm

Intention

Self-efficacy

Skills

Behavior

Environmental Constraints

Educational sessions included:
- Participants shared their knowledge, perceptions, and apprehensions regarding low Ca intake and risk of osteoporosis
- Brainstorming on how to overcome barriers
- Provided with information – dietary recommendations, etc.

Post-intervention: Higher calcium intake was explained by higher perceived susceptibility, increased perception of severity, and increase in self-efficacy

Bhurosy T, Jeewon R. Effectiveness of Theory-Driven Nutritional Education Program in Improving Calcium Intake among Older Mauritian Adults. Sci World J; 2013
Table 3. Attributes from health behavior change theories and models that predispose an individual to successful behavior change $^{39,45,49}$

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Strongly wants and intends to change for clear, personal reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Faces a minimum of obstacles (information processing, physical, logistical, or environmental barriers) to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Has the requisite skills and self-confidence to make a change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Feels positively about the change and believes it will result in meaningful benefit(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Perceives the change as congruent with his/her self-image and social group(s) norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Receives reminders, encouragement, and support to change at appropriate times and places from valued persons and community sources, and is in a largely supportive community/environment for the change</td>
</tr>
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Stage models of behavior change

DNA info.com
People at different stages require different interventions

Transtheoretical model (TTM)

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
Using narratives: *Statistics are not more powerful than stories*

- Narrative – a story with a beginning, middle and end (conflict resolution)

- Instead of inspiring argument, listeners soften their position, increase engagement

Using narratives can help:

- Overcome resistance
- Reduce complex or emotional material
- Overcome medical mistrust

“It was hard sharing my cancer diagnosis with my son.”

vs.

“When I told my 8-yr old son I had cancer, he didn’t say anything for a minute. I could see there were tears in his big brown eyes, but he brushed them away with the back of his hand. Then he threw his arms around me and squeezed me hard.”

Melanoma prevention

Narrative: first person account of a 21-yr old student who had been diagnosed with skin cancer, with photo

Non-narrative: factual information about skin CA diagnosis and a drawing of the layers of the skin

Both contained similar info about susceptibility, consequences, self-efficacy

Lemal M. Van den Bulck J. Prev Med 2010
Recipients of the narrative message:

- 3 x more likely to have checked their skin for moles one month afterward
- 2 x more likely to have talked to family members about skin cancer

Lemal M. Van den Bulck J. Prev Med 2010
Great Lakes fish consumption

- Brochures
  - Narrative
  - FAQs

Do you think eating fish has risks for women who might become pregnant?

Like Jennifer, you might be surprised to learn that fish is an important part of a healthy diet.

After being away for several years, Jennifer and Mike recently moved back to their hometown of Chicago, Illinois. They decided it was time to try to have a baby. A baby is a big change, so Jennifer began doing her homework on exercise and nutrition that would help her have a healthy baby.

Jennifer found a website with guidelines about eating fish for women of childbearing age. The website explained that, although many women don’t eat fish before and during pregnancy, certain fish are actually a great source of omega-3s. Omega-3s are important for a baby’s development and are not found in many other foods. Fish are also a very nutritious food for children to eat as they grow.

Jennifer wasn’t convinced. She looked for other sources and found the Illinois Department of Public Health’s Fish Consumption Guidelines. These guidelines confirmed that while some types of fish contain higher levels of chemicals like mercury or PCBs, many fish are healthy for women and children to eat. These guidelines (found in this brochure) helped her to choose which fish are healthiest to eat and which she should avoid.

Now that Jennifer is pregnant she is using the guidelines to choose which fish to eat. She is happy because salmon is one of her favorite foods!

Frequently Asked Questions about Eating Fish

I heard that eating fish has risks for women who might become pregnant - is this true?

Certain fish are actually a great source of omega-3s. Omega-3s are important for a baby’s development and are not found in many other foods. Fish are also a very nutritious food for children to eat as they grow.

But aren’t there harmful chemicals in fish, too?

Some types of fish contain higher levels of chemicals like mercury or PCBs, but many fish are healthy for women and children to eat.

Where can I find out which fish are healthy to eat and which I should avoid?

Illinois’s Fish Consumption Guidelines can help you to choose which fish are healthiest to eat and which you should avoid. These guidelines can be found in this brochure!
Great Lakes fish consumption

Narrative format:

- increased consumption among women who were eating the least amount of fish
- decreased consumption among women who were eating too much fish

YOUR TURN!
Create a Health Message

- Have your child tested for lead
- Don’t microwave food in plastic containers
- Minimize use of synthetic chemicals (fragrances, home cleaners, plastics)

Remember:
- Social norms
- Gain/loss framing
- Beliefs/attitudes
- Perceived barriers
- Self-efficacy
- Narratives
Webinars
Series of scientific webinars that provide a forum for discourse on scientific issues.
Live and On-Demand
Case Conferences
Journal Clubs
Grand Rounds
CE Available

Online Courses
Evidence-based online courses on a variety of children's environmental health topics.
Interactive and Self-Paced
CE Available

Resource Catalog
Fact sheets, journal publications, reports, and other resources for parents, community members, patients and healthcare professionals
Topics included:
Air Quality, Pesticides, Natural Disasters, BPA, Mold, Lead, Mercury