



Advancing physical activity knowledge and participation
among Canadians living with spinal cord injury.

Exercise stories about people “just like you” may not be helpful for people with SCI

Purpose

To determine if stories about people similar to the reader would help motivate exercise.

Summary

- People felt worse about themselves after reading exercise stories about people similar to themselves.
- People didn't feel motivated to do more exercise after reading the stories.

Possible Applications

- People with SCI should not use stories of people similar to themselves to help motivate exercise.
- People with SCI should ask for the exercise information they think would help them begin, and stick to, regular exercise.

Research Abstract

SCI Active Living Guide: Physical Activity Vignettes for People with SCI Should Not Target Social Cognition Change

Past research suggests that targeting changes in physical activity social cognitions, or the thoughts and feelings one has about physical activity, may lead to increases in physical activity behavior itself. Theory posits that one way to change social cognitions is through a vicarious experience. A vicarious experience is a form of modeling or mimicry that occurs when an individual observes someone who is similar to himself or herself perform a task. If perceived similarity is high, then social cognitions for that task are thought to increase. One source of a vicarious experience is the use of a vignette. A vignette is a story-like text, usually from the point of view of the character, describing an event or task. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a vignette aimed at changing physical activity social cognitions. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental or control vignette exposure condition. Those in the experimental condition were exposed to a tailored vignette based on personal characteristics, while those in the control condition were exposed to a neutral vignette. Social cognitions were measured one-week before, and immediately following, exposure to the vignette. It was hypothesized that social cognitions would increase after exposure to the vignette in the experimental condition, as compared to the control condition. Repeated measures ANOVAs showed that social cognitions generally decreased in those exposed to the experimental vignette, with only coping plans approaching a significant decrease ($t(17) = 2.10, p < .05$). Exploratory analyses suggest that perceived similarity to the vignette character may be a key variable contributing to the ineffectiveness of the experimental vignette. Overall, it is suggested that physical activity vignettes not target social cognition change.

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