

Can Newly Acquired Healthy Behaviors Persist? An Analysis of Health Behavior Decay

Merrill RM, Aldana SG, Greenlaw RL, Diehl HA, Salberg A, Englert H. 2008. "Can newly acquired healthy behaviors persist? An analysis of health behavior decay." *Prev Chronic Dis*, 5(1): A13-28

Abstract

Introduction

We evaluated data from the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) to determine whether improved health behaviors associated with this intervention persisted or decayed during 18 months of follow-up.

Methods

Participants were 348 volunteers aged 24 to 81 years from the Rockford, Illinois, metropolitan area enrolled in CHIP, a 4-week educational course delivered as lectures. The intervention taught the importance of making better lifestyle choices and improving dietary and physical activity behaviors. Physical activity and dietary behaviors were assessed at baseline, and changes in behaviors were assessed at 6 weeks and 18 months. Changes were evaluated according to quartile groupings of each variable at baseline.

Results

No baseline differences were found between participants who dropped out and participants who provided data through 18 months. Mean changes significantly improved through 6 weeks for each of the 21 selected physical activity and dietary behavior variables except percentage of daily calories from carbohydrates. Mean changes significantly improved through 18 months for each of the 21 variables except calories from protein, alcohol, and whole grain servings. The percentage of participants who improved their physical or dietary behavior at 6 weeks ranged from 49% for percentage of daily calories from carbohydrates (64% at 18 months) to 91% for intake of dietary cholesterol per day (84% at 18 months). The level of change through 18 months for all variables was significantly influenced by quartile groupings at baseline. Physical activity improved significantly through 18 months only for participants in the lowest two quartiles of physical activity at baseline. Exercise

decreased significantly through 18 months for participants in the highest quartile of physical activity at baseline.

Conclusion

During an 18-month period, participants' physical activity and dietary behaviors improved significantly. Even though behavior improvement tended to be greater at 6 weeks, most healthy behaviors did not return to baseline levels after 18 months.