

1. Setting the scene

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

His name is Phillip, he is aged 41, with a height of 1,79m and a weight of 114kg. Phillip has had these measurements for several years now and is looking for help. He has his first appointment with personal trainer Tim. Tim: 'Why are you here, Phillip? How can I help you?' Phillip: 'Well, my wife tells me I need to exercise. I gained some extra weight over the last couple of years, but it's just that I don't have time to exercise. I work 60 hours a week and at the weekends I want to spend time with my family.'

Tim: 'Ok, I understand what you are saying. Do you have an idea why you gained weight?' Phillip: 'No, not really. You see, it's not that I eat that much. Sometimes I even skip breakfast, so lunch is my first meal. But of course, I do enjoy a good glass of red wine and a cigar when I come home, often more than one. Due to my job as an account manager, I am driving in my car the whole day, arrive at home late and eat even later in the evening.' Tim continues to ask questions on items like nutrition, exercise, lifestyle, and more.

Sometime later in the conversation Tim asks: 'So what is your goal, Phillip? And how do you want me to help you?' Phillip: 'I don't exactly know. I think my weight is too high and I guess it's good for me to get a little fitter. But, I have tried many times to find the time to make changes but it's not that easy.' Tim: 'What do you like most when it comes to exercise? And, when do you prefer to exercise?' Tim keeps on asking for more details.....

As a fitness, health or sport professional you can face all kinds of people every day who will have many different stories and backgrounds. Nowadays there is an increasing amount of overweight or even obese people. These people can have some kind of motivation to start working out such as our example of Phillip ('My wife tells me I need to work out'). Often they are aware of some unhealthy habits, but they lack a clear idea what they really need to improve in general.

In the case of Phillip, the first understanding is that he needs to lose some weight. His wife explained that exercise could do the job. But there is much more to change to improve his health. For example his sitting behaviour (driving in my car the whole day), eating behaviour (eating late), etcetera. Many people can add other issues such as being a smoker, or with poor sleeping and suffering from stress. The common ground for many people is that at least some changes are needed for more than one type of their behaviour which is adversely affecting their health.

1.2 HEALTH BEHAVIOUR

Even though participating in a fitness programme is something completely different from brushing your teeth, both are examples of behaviour, and more specifically health behaviour. Brushing keeps your teeth healthy and fitness keeps the vital organs healthy. It is an interesting question: Why are most people relatively consistent in brushing their teeth whilst they are often inconsistent when it comes to exercising or participating in fitness programmes?

Many questions surround health-related behaviour issues that are not yet well understood. Therefore, both public health workers (including fitness & health professionals) and scientific researchers continue to attempt to understand the nature and causes of many different health behaviours. In this context health behaviour encompasses a large field of study that cuts across various areas, including psychology, education, sociology, public health, epidemiology, and anthropology. According to Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 8th edition, 2009, Elsevier, health behaviour is: An action taken by a person to maintain, attain, or regain good health and to prevent illness. Health behaviour reflects a person's health beliefs. Some common health behaviours are exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet, and obtaining necessary inoculations.

So, when considering that health behaviour is any activity undertaken by an individual, regardless of actual or perceived health status, for the purpose of promoting, protecting or maintaining health (whether or not such behaviour is objectively effective towards that end), it is possible to argue that almost every behaviour or activity by an individual has an impact on health status. In this context, it will be very useful to differentiate between behaviours which are purposefully adopted to promote or protect health (as regular physical activity and/or exercise), and those which may be adopted regardless of the consequences to health.

Health behaviours are sometimes distinguished from risk behaviours which are defined separately as behaviours associated with increased susceptibility to a specific cause of ill-health (i.e. smoking or alcohol consumption). Health behaviours and risk behaviours are often related in clusters in a more complex pattern of behaviours referred to as lifestyle.

Another important concept to consider here is the concept of 'determinants of health'. Determinants of health include a range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors which determine the health status of individuals or populations, because they are influencing a daily decision-making process that will involve determined health behaviours. The factors which influence health are then multiple and interactive.

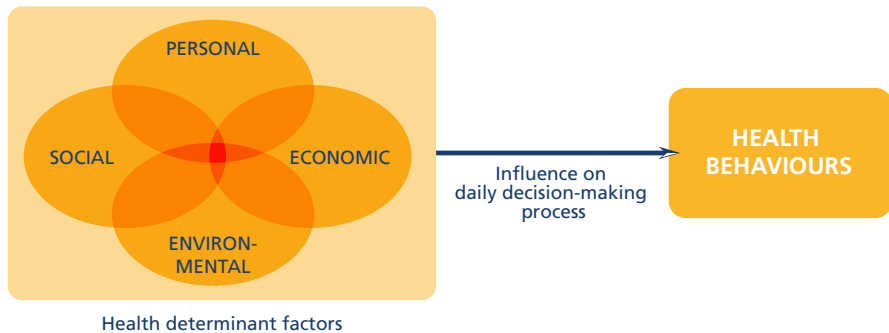


Figure 1.1: Determinants versus health behaviours.

Health promotion is fundamentally concerned with action and advocacy to address the full range of potentially modifiable determinants of health. These include not only those which are related to the actions of individuals, such as health behaviours and lifestyles, but also factors such as income and social status, education, employment and working conditions, access to appropriate health services, and the physical environments. In combination they create different living conditions which impact on health of individuals. Achieving change in these lifestyle and living conditions which determine health status are considered to be intermediate health outcomes.

In the broadest sense, health behaviour refers to the actions of individuals, groups, and organisations, as well as the determinants, the correlation, and consequences, of these actions, which can include social change, policy development and implementation, improved coping skills, and enhanced quality of life. This is similar to the working definition of health behaviour that David Gochman proposed, which includes not only observable, overt actions, but also the mental events and emotional states that can be reported and measured.

Gochman defined health behaviour as ‘...those personal attributes such as beliefs, expectations, motives, values, perceptions, and other cognitive elements; personality characteristics, including affective and emotional states and traits; and overt behaviour patterns, actions, and habits that relate to health maintenance, to health restoration, and to health improvement.’ Interestingly, this definition emphasises the actions and the health of individuals. A public health perspective, in contrast, is concerned with individuals as part of a larger community. These views are interrelated because the behaviour of individuals determines many of the social conditions that affect all of people’s health.

Key message for fitness, health and sport professionals

Health-related behaviour is one of the most important elements in people’s health and well-being. Its importance has grown as sanitation has improved and medicine has advanced. Diseases that were once incurable or fatal can now be prevented or successfully treated, and health-related behaviour has become an important component of public health. The improvement of health-related behaviours is, therefore, central to public health activities.

Types of health behaviour (of adults)

There are three categories of health behaviour ⁽¹⁾:

- *Preventive health behaviour* involves any activity undertaken by individuals who believe themselves to be healthy for the purpose of preventing or detecting illness in an asymptomatic state. This can include self-protective behaviour, which is an action intended to confer protection from potential harm, such as wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle, using seat belts, or wearing a condom during sexual activity. Self-protective behaviour is also known as cautious behaviour.