

Health Motivation vs. Appearance Motivation By Jeremy Workman

According to *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Motivation can be defined as the direction and intensity of one's effort. The proper evaluation of an individual's motivation as it pertains to health and fitness is important to help them sustain their exercise routine. This article will more look at the direction of an individual in health and fitness, whether they are health motivated or appearance motivated, and evaluate that direction to help them continue on a good exercise path.

The first items to look at are the two main types of motivation. They are intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is benefits, rewards, and punishments that reside within the individual. Examples of intrinsic motivation in relation to exercise are feeling better and they know it is healthy, they feel less stressed, and goals that are made by the individual. Extrinsic motivation is benefits, rewards, and punishments that come from external sources. Examples of extrinsic motivation in relation to exercise are positive reinforcement from family or friends such as "You lost weight, you look good", a physician saying a person needs to start exercising because of health reasons, there could also be outside rewards from health clubs and weight loss groups to praise losing weight or inches. Each person does not just have to be strictly intrinsic or extrinsic. An example is a person could primarily exercise for health benefits and to reduce stress, both are which intrinsically motivated. That person every once in a while likes to hear someone say "Wow you better every time I see you." That is a positive reinforcement that motivates that person extrinsically.

It is also important to know how each person views exercise. This is also a motivating factor. One perception of exercise is perceived threat. This is when an individual is motivated to exercise because of a perceived high risk of disease or illness, which left untreated, could have unfavorable consequences. Examples of these threats could be heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis, and many, many more. The other perception is perceived benefits where an individual sees exercise as a benefit to ward of illness or disease.

Exercise must be defined before looking at motivational factors. Exercise is defined by the I.A.R.T. (International Association of Resistance Trainers) as the *vigorous muscular exertion performed with the intent of making an inroad into the body's functional ability in order to stimulate a physiological adaptive response to decelerate loss, maintain, or increase said functional ability.* To put simply, it is demanding work for the muscles in order to get a physiological response. What motivates individuals to exercise? You can classify motivation into two areas. There is appearance motivation in which an individual's goal is for their body to look a certain way. A good example of this is a person wanting to lose weight to look better. The other kind is health motivation where an individual is exercising for health improvement. A good example is reduction of cholesterol or blood pressure to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease. There are benefits and drawbacks of each when comparing the two.

Appearance motivation is why very many people began exercising. Some reasons why are they wanted to lose weight or inches, they want a flat stomach, they want bigger arms or bigger chest,

or they want to be toned. The biggest appearance motivation reason is weight loss to look better. There are some benefits to appearance motivation. The first is it can be a strong factor in just beginning a program. Our society puts a value on thinness and having a good body. This motivates individuals into exercising to help them achieve a leaner or thinner look. Another benefit is that it can be very goal oriented and have clearly defined goals. These goals can be broken up into long-term goals and short-term goals. Example is an individual having a long-term goal of wanting to lose 50 pounds. The goal is very clear and it can be broken up into 5 short-term goals of losing 10 pounds. Another benefit is a person can actually see their improved appearance. Good examples of this are their clothes are fitting better, the scale shows actual weight loss, and certain areas of the body measure bigger or smaller.

There are some drawbacks to someone having appearance motivation. One drawback is unsafe exercise lifestyle. One condition is known as Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). BDD is defined by The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as an unhealthy preoccupation with one's physical appearance or body image. One form of BDD is called Muscle Dysmorphia (BD). This occurs almost exclusively in males. BD is just the opposite of anorexia nervosa whereas men feel they are underdeveloped in their muscularity. This can lead to over training, steroid use, and their daily lives are negatively affected such as work and relationships. Another drawback is people get discouraged when their goal of looking a certain way is not reached. This could be a result of very many reasons such as inconceivable goals, genetics, the wrong plan of action, and lack of patience. This is a point where people might stop exercising because they do get discouraged, they might change their exercise routine to where it is unsafe (over training), and they might start using ergogenic aids that could cause an adverse affect. It is important to note that even though the conditions anorexia nervosa and bulimia are eating disorders, they are a result of appearance motivation in where an individual does not want to be overweight. One symptom of these conditions is over exercising but it is not the main reason for the condition.

Being motivated by health has some benefits and drawbacks as well. First, some common health reasons people start and continue exercising. They are to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, to maintain bone strength in order to reduce the risk of osteoporosis, weight loss for lowered health risks, and increase muscular strength, the reduction of stress, improved mental state, and many more. One benefit to health motivation is that it could help an individual continue to exercise. In one study, long-term exercisers stay motivated for the simple reason to improve and/or maintain a good level of fitness, which relates to good health. With the individuals need to improve their fitness level; a greater level of fitness is achieved. Higher levels of fitness are related to increased reductions in morbidity and mortality. Another important benefit to health motivation is improved well-being. In the same study, the second reason why long-term exercisers continued to exercise is well being which is how they feel. Long-term exercisers do notice feeling better when they exercise and this factor alone motivates them to stay on course with their routine. Individuals who are health motivated focus on other positive aspects of exercise such as energy, gratification, better sleep, more alert, and stress-free. Another aspect to health motivation is that people are not as focused on appearance, so they might not get discouraged when they see no changes over a given period of time. They will still exercise because of the important health reasons they know they are experiencing. A good example of this is a person who is trying to lose weight over the holidays. They might just maintain body weight during this time because increased caloric input due to parties and

functions. They might get discouraged and not continue to exercise whereas a person who is health motivated might exercise to keep up their health and mental state. One powerful health motivator for exercise is an individual's physician. When their doctor stresses the importance of exercise for an individual, they usually listen. This is a good example of extrinsic motivation for health reasons. Common reasons why a doctor will order a person to exercise are to decrease factors that are associated with cardiovascular disease, decrease body weight, and prevention of osteoporosis.

Now, there are some drawbacks to being motivated by health. One important one is that people might not see their gains very easily. Example is someone who wants to exercise to reduce cholesterol in order to lower his or her risk of heart disease. They cannot see if they are making progress or not until they take a blood test, which can be a long time. In this and other cases, a person must believe that what they are doing is beneficial to their health and make long term realistic goals in relation to exercise. Another drawback to health motivation is related to well being. It might take a beginner exerciser a long time to feel or notice many positive feelings that are related to health and well being. A beginner might experience some positive feelings but they may not be as intrinsic as a long-term exerciser. Hopefully, the motivation can lead to more intrinsic behavior, which will result in long-term exercise.

Both appearance motivation and health motivation have some important benefits as well as some drawbacks. The most important benefit to being appearance motivation is that people use it to start an exercise routine in order for improved body appearance such as looking leaner or thinner. However, many drawbacks can happen when people focus entirely on body image in order to achieve that perfect look. An important benefit to health motivation is how it is linked to long-term exercisers. People that have been exercising on a long-term basis, do so because of health and fitness reasons including their enhanced mental well being that is attributed to exercising. The drawback is that it might take a long period of time in the course of regimen to start feeling the positive affects of their health and well-being.