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Can financial and charitable incentives motivate people to adopt an active lifestyle?

Submission date
24/02/2016

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
29/02/2016

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
17/12/2018

Condition category
Circulatory System

[_] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
This study examines whether a financial incentive (gaining money) or a charitable incentive (a donation to a charitable organization) can motivate people to increase their daily physical activity. Daily physical activity has proven to be beneficial to prevent different chronic diseases such as obesity or diabetes. We used a step counter (pedometer) to measure physical activity.

Who can participate?
Customers of a large Swiss health insurance company registered in a complementary insurance program. They should be healthy and at least 18 years old.

What does the study involve?
Participants are randomly allocated to one of three different groups, according to their canton (state of residence), i.e. all participants living in a particular canton are placed in the same group. They are all given a pedometer and are instructed to achieve 10.000 steps per day on average each month. Participants in group 1 receive money if they reach their goal. Participants in group 2 also receive money but have the option of donating if they wish. Participants in group 3 receive no incentive.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
By taking part in the study participants can benefit from all positive effects associated with physical activity such as prevention of chronic diseases, improved health and well-being. Depending on the state of their health, participants might eventually encounter negative effects due to increased physical activity. However, people who are at risk of being negatively affected by physical activity do not fulfil the eligibility requirements of the study.

Where is the study run from?
Health-IS lab of the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland and the ETH Zurich, Switzerland.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
July 2015 to December 2015

Who is funding the study?
1. CSS Insurance (Switzerland)
2. Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (Switzerland)
3. University of St. Gallen (Switzerland)

Who is the main contact?
Tobias Kowatsch

Contact information

Type(s)
Scientific

Contact name
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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number
N/A

Study information

Scientific Title
Financial and Charity Incentives to Encourage Participation in a Physical Activity Promotion Program Offered by a Health Insurer: A Cluster-Randomized Controlled Trial

Study objectives
The following research questions are addressed in our study:
1. Do financial and/or charitable incentives enhance the acceptance of and adherence to a pedometer based health intervention compared to a non-incentive control group?
2. Does a pedometer-based health intervention improve participants' subjective and objective measures of health status?
3. How does the participation in a pedometer-based health intervention affect the participants' perception of the provider of the intervention?
4. How do financial and charitable incentives affect the participants' perception of the provider of the intervention?

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)

Ethics Committee of the University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland, 17/02/2016, ref: HSG-EC-2015-04-22-A

Study design
Longitudinal three arm cluster-randomized controlled trial

Primary study design
Interventional

Study type(s)
Prevention

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Non-communicable diseases that can be affected by physical activity (for example, cardiovascular diseases or diabetes)

Interventions
Participants used a pedometer to track their daily physical activity. Two different incentive strategies are compared with a control-group that receives no incentives.

In the financial incentive condition, participants receive a financial reward each month they achieve a physical activity goal that is associated with a health promoting lifestyle (10,000 steps per day on average) and a smaller reward if they achieve a physical activity goal that is associated with the physical activity minimum for a health promoting lifestyle (7,500 steps per day on average).

Participants in the charitable condition receive the same reward but can decide whether to keep the money or donate it to a charitable organization.

Participants in the control condition receive no incentives over the first half of the intervention. In the second half they get the opportunity to receive a financial reward that is twice the size of the reward in the financial incentive condition. That way, participants of all three groups have the chance to receive the same amount of money over the course of the intervention.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Participation rate (method: number of registered participants; timepoint: beginning of the intervention)

Key secondary outcome(s))
1. Adherence to the intervention, assessed as number of days participants shared their number of steps, continuously measured over the course of the intervention
2. Participants' performance, assessed by number of steps walked per day, amount of money earned / donated, continuously measured over the course of the intervention
3. Subjective health status, assessed by questionnaire, at the beginning and at the end of the intervention
4. Objective health status, assessed by service billing of the participants insurance company over the period of the intervention and over three months after the intervention

5. Perception of the provider of the intervention, assessed by questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the intervention

Completion date
31/12/2015

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
1. Participants have to be at least 18 years of age
2. Registered in a complementary insurance program
3. Acceptance of data security and participation conditions
4. Declaration of adequate health status for participation

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Adult

Lower age limit
18 years

Sex
All

Key exclusion criteria
1. Under 18 years of age
2. Not registered in a complementary insurance program
3. No acceptance of data security and participation conditions
4. No declaration of adequate health status for participation

Date of first enrolment
04/06/2015

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2015

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Switzerland

Study participating centre

Health IS Lab, University of St. Gallen
St. Gallen
Switzerland
9000

Study participating centre
ETH Zurich
Zurich
Switzerland
-

Sponsor information

Organisation
Health IS Lab

ROR
https://ror.org/0561a3s31

Funder(s)

Funder type
Not defined

Funder Name
CSS Insurance

Funder Name
Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich

Alternative Name(s)
ETH Zurich, ETH Zürich, Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, ETH Zürich (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich), Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (Switzerland), Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (ETH), ethzurich, ETH

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Universities (academic only)

Location
Switzerland

Funder Name
Universität St. Gallen

Alternative Name(s)
University of St. Gallen, The University of St. Gallen, Die Universität St.Gallen, HSG, UG

Funding Body Type
Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Universities (academic only)

Location
Switzerland

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not expected to be made available as no consent to share data from this study (anonymized or not) was obtained from participants. Participant data are stored in a locked room at the University of St.Gallen, Switzerland. Data access is protected by a password which is only known to the responsible researchers.

IPD sharing plan summary
Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article	results	01/02/2019		Yes	No