

Encouraging Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Through Intuitive Theory Building

Derek Powell
Stanford University

Ellen Markman
Stanford University

Abstract: Although routinely informed of the benefits of fruits and vegetables, Americans eat far short of the recommended amounts. Instead of just telling people that fruits and vegetables are healthy, providing a compelling causal and teleological explanatory framework could increase both people's conviction about their health benefits and commitment to increasing the amount and variety of fruits and vegetables they consume. Our brief intervention: (1) emphasizes that fruits and vegetables have thousands of health-promoting phytochemicals, well beyond just vitamins, (2) describes clear causal mechanisms by which these foods ensure cellular health, (3) draws an analogy between the benefits of plant-based foods and the power of plant-derived medicines, and (4) explains that plants contain abundant nutrients because they must manufacture these chemicals for their own survival. This novel intervention improved understanding and increased participants' intentions to eat more fruits and vegetables, illustrating how intuitive theories can shape motivation for behavioral change.