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P1, P1.250

## In their own words: Young adults perceptions of health and health enhancing behaviours

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Motivation and behavior change, Congress Hall Foyer Level 2, June 5, 2019, 10:50 AM - 12:05 PM

*Motivation and behavior change (SIG)*

### Objective:

Young adults (YA) are in a transitional stage of their lives, figuring out their values and habits. This is a critical stage for the encouragement of healthy behaviours such as healthy eating and exercising. However, it is unclear what types of strategies to encourage these behaviours resonate with YA. The aim of this research was to explore YA values and perceptions in the context of health and healthy behaviour promotion strategies.

### Methods:

This qualitative study involved n166, 18-24 year olds engaging in a facilitated in-depth online conversation about health over 4 weeks. Participants were recruited via market research field-house databases and used a 'virtual lounge room' methodology. Discussion topics included perceptions of health and strategies they would use to encourage the health-enhancing behaviour of healthy eating. Data analysis was conducted independently by two authors using Leximancer™ or by manual inductive thematic coding to elicit meaning from the conversations. Analysis using Leximancer™ involved input of textual conversations into the content analysis program for development of key ideas, followed by manual thematic analysis.

### Results:

Health, to this cohort of YA, is multi-faceted, and many place particular importance on good mental health and exercise. Health to some was more focussed on physical appearance, often fuelled by comparison to others. Many YA believed that at their age and health status, adopting health-enhancing behaviours was not a priority. Participants believed they were not able to or do not prioritise health-enhancing behaviours due to barriers such as a perceived lack of time, money, knowledge and perceived effort of these behaviours over alternatives such as convenience foods. Strategies they proposed to encourage healthy eating included: incentivising healthy food with monetary rewards or discounts; dispelling inconsistent messages by increasing knowledge of healthy food; quick and affordable healthy recipes; and promoting the short-term tangible benefits of healthy behaviours such as emotional and physical wellbeing.

### Conclusions:

Some YA need motivation and incentives to focus on their health, as the long-term consequences are not sufficiently tangible. There is a need for focussed health messaging that address the needs and desires of YA and directly addresses the barriers they face.