

Paving the path for habit change: cognitive shielding of intentions against habit intrusion.

[Danner UN](#), [Aarts H](#), [Papies EK](#), [de Vries NK](#).

Source

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the current study was to examine the cognitive processes that make it possible to use intentions to change one's habitual health-related behaviour.

DESIGN:

The study used an idiosyncratic approach to investigate personal existing habits and non-habitual behaviours in a within-participants experiment.

METHOD:

Participants first generated habitual and non-habitual behaviours for various daily-life goals (e.g., having lunch, playing sports). Next, they formed intentions to perform non-habitual behaviours in order to attain these goals. Finally, we measured the cognitive accessibility of participants' habitual and non-habitual behaviours with a behaviour recognition task.

RESULTS:

The findings showed that habitual behaviours were more accessible than the non-habitual behaviours when no intentions were formed (control goals), showing that habits are more readily accessed in mind. However, when participants had formed intentions to use non-habitual behaviours, habitual behaviours for the same goals were inhibited in mind. This could be the cognitive mechanism that shields intentions from habit intrusion and thus enables the pursuit of non-habitual behaviours.

CONCLUSION:

The current study demonstrates the role of inhibitory processes in shielding non-habitual intentions in memory. These findings are discussed in the context of success and failure in changing health-related habits.

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