



Title **A Systematic Review of the Effectiveness of Interventions Based on a Stages-of-change Approach to Promote Individual Behaviour Change**

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Aim

To systematically assess the effectiveness of interventions using a stage-based approach to bring about positive changes in health-related behavior.

Conclusions and results

The review included 37 RCTs. Three studies evaluated interventions aimed at prevention (2 for alcohol consumption and 1 for cigarette smoking). Interventions in 13 trials targeted smoking cessation, 7 studies evaluated interventions aimed at promoting physical activity, and 5 studies evaluated interventions aimed at dietary change. Six trials evaluated interventions aimed at multiple lifestyle changes. Two studies evaluated interventions aimed at promoting mammography screening. One study evaluated an intervention aimed at promoting treatment adherence. Methodological quality was mixed. The main problems were lack of detail on the methods used to produce true randomization; lack of blinding of participants, outcome assessors, and care-providers; and failure to use intention-to-treat analysis. The main issue with the quality of implementation was lack of information on the validity of the instrument used to assess an individual's stage of change. The full report gives more detailed information on the results.

Recommendations

Little evidence suggests that stage-based interventions are more effective than non-stage-based interventions, no intervention, or usual care. There is no apparent relationship between the methodological quality of the study, the targeted behavior, or quality of the implementation and effectiveness of the stage-based intervention. Given the limited evidence on the effectiveness of interventions tailored to the stages-of-change approach, practitioners and policy makers need to recognize that this approach has a status which appears to be unwarranted when it is evaluated in a systematic way.

Methods

Numerous electronic databases were searched from inception to May 2000. Other Internet searches were done using various search engines. The bibliographies of retrieved references were scanned for further relevant publications. Authors of abstracts appearing in conference proceedings identified by the literature search were contacted for further information. Two independent reviewers assessed full papers against the review selection criteria. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Information on the implementation of each intervention and training of relevant professionals was also recorded. Each trial was assessed against a comprehensive checklist for methodological quality and quality in implementing the intervention. Quality was assessed by one reviewer and checked by a second, with disagreements resolved by discussion.

Further research/reviews required

There is a need for well-designed and appropriately implemented RCTs that tailor interventions derived from accurate stage measurement, and which involve frequent reassessment of readiness to change to permit evolving, stage-specific, interventions.