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Low-Cost Approaches to Increasing Gym Attendance

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Abstract

We investigate the effect of two low-cost experimental interventions designed to increase physical exercise: a lottery based financial incentive and a social norming treatment. The lottery intervention provides a financial incentive to increase physical activity whereas the social norming intervention attempts to increase physical activity by providing feedback to individuals on their own and their peers' physical exercise activity. We find the larger of our two lottery treatments yields a positive and statistically significant effect on physical activity at modest cost, whereas our social norming treatment has no detectable effect.

Keywords: Physical Exercise, Lottery, Financial Incentive, Social Norms

1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity a week (HHS 2015). Being physically active has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, reduce body weight and body fat (Beavers et al. 2014), and increase well-being (Hurwitz et al. 2005). Physical inactivity has been linked to a host of adverse health outcomes, including but not limited to obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, hypertension, and depression (Warburton et al. 2006; Lee et al. 2012). In spite of public exhortations and private benefits only half the adult population is physically active (Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2013). Fewer still – roughly one in five – meet the CDC physical activity recommendations (CDC 2013). Given this systematic shortfall, understanding the

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