

Study finds differences in how men and women perceive their own health

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A Mayo Clinic study published in the *American Journal of Health Behavior* investigates differences in how men and women perceive their own health. The study finds that confidence in maintaining good health

habits can be influenced by gender.

Men reported higher levels of physical activity and greater confidence in their ability to remain physically active, according to the study, which surveyed 2,784 users at the Mayo Clinic Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center, an employee wellness center. Men and women had comparable levels of confidence that they would maintain a [healthy diet](#).

"Our findings suggest that confidence in maintaining health habits can be influenced by gender and also depends on which specific habit is being assessed—physical activity, for example, versus diet," says Richa Sood, M.D., a Mayo Clinic internist, and a co-author and designer of the study. "This is [important information](#) to keep in mind when designing wellness programs, to maximize their utilization and impact on employee health and wellness."

To learn more about possible gender-specific factors for underutilization of employee wellness centers, researchers distributed surveys to 11,427 wellness center users, 2,784 of whom responded with complete data. Of the respondents, 68% were women, and the mean age was 49.

The survey asked questions about users' [health status](#) and select health conditions, confidence in maintaining healthy habits, and stress level and social interactions. Men and women reported comparable levels of stress and support for healthy living, according to the study. More men reported having hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol and tobacco use than women. Nonetheless, there was no significant gender difference in perception of personal health.

"We were surprised by the finding that men felt they were as healthy as women despite having more medical problems," Dr. Sood says.

Women had lower self-reported levels of physical activity and lower

confidence that they would maintain that activity.

"This difference may have cultural roots because gender has been shown to influence self-efficacy, particularly for [physical activity](#)," says Dr. Sood. "Our study shows that self-efficacy is domain-dependent and can't be generalized as a gender-specific trait. But understanding gender differences among working adults can help optimize employee wellness services."

Despite the availability of employee wellness centers across the country, the services typically are underused, according to the study. Incorporating gender-specific elements in the design and programming of wellness centers can improve their use, enhance [wellness](#) and indirectly reduce [health](#) care costs.

More information: Richa Sood et al, Gender Differences in Self-perception of Health at a Wellness Center, *American Journal of Health Behavior* (2019). [DOI: 10.5993/AJHB.43.6.10](https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.43.6.10)

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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