Thinking about health like a behavioral scientist

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We have lots of problems to solve
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Overeating  Unnecessary surgeries  Dental hygiene
Medication adherence  PCP Underuse  Hand washing
Under-vaccination  Physical inactivity  Antibiotics overuse
Smoking  Stress  Sitting
Alcohol  Anxiety  Screen time
Sugar  Conflicts of interest  Drugs
Opioids  Drinking water  Time-out compliance
Unprotected sex  Preservatives  Palliative care

Intuition?
Readiness Continuum

Not ready for change → "On the fence" → Ready to change

- Not aware of the problem
- Uncertain about accepting the problem
- Accepts problem and prepares to change
Does it work?

“How important are these for your health?”

- Exercise: 79%
- Diet: 81%
- Checking blood: 75%
- Medication: 84%
REGAINING LOST WEIGHT
13 of the 14 contestants studied regained weight in the six years after the competition. Four contestants are heavier now than before the competition.

Ereik Egbert is the only contestant who weighs less today than six years ago.

Rudy Pauls regained 80 percent of his lost weight, then had surgery to reduce the size of his stomach.

Danny Cahill lost 200 pounds and won the competition, but has regained over 100 pounds.

“The Biggest Loser”
Season 8 (2009)
Why not?
We ignore unpleasant information

We see what we want to see
Overconfidence: We give ourselves the benefit of the doubt

But emotions matter a lot
Context matters....
...so let’s be environment engineers
Hey Charles! I see you did not take your medication yet today. It's time to take it now.
Opt-in Approach

Check the box if you want to participate in the organ donor program

People don't check the box – and don't join

Opt-out Approach

Check the box if you don't want to participate in the organ donor program

People don't check the box – and join
How to be an environment engineer

Principal #1: Change the defaults

- The *environment* is usually more important than the individual
- Lots of things in the context can be *changed*
Principal #2: Friction

- Make it *easier* to do the right thing
- Make it *harder* to do the wrong thing

Principal #3: Reward substitution

- The present matters more than the future
- Right thing for the wrong reason:
Humans are complex

Want to hear more? Reach out!

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