Neurocognitive Influences on Health Behavior in a Community Sample.

Context: Dominant models of individual health behavior omit biological variables entirely and are composed almost exclusively of social-cognitive and conative variables. Research from the neurosciences suggests a role for brain function in explaining behaviors that require active self-regulation for consistent performance. However, the association between brain function and health behavior is underexplored. **Objective:** To examine the predictive power of executive function for 2 health risk behaviors and 2 health protective behaviors in healthy adults. **Design:** A cross-sectional community sample (N = 216) of adults 20-100 years of age were administered a battery of neuropsychological tests and completed self-report questionnaires regarding their health practices. It was hypothesized that poor performance on neuropsychological tests tapping executive function would be associated with poor health behavior tendencies. **Results:** Errors on the Stroop task were positively associated with health risk behavior and negatively associated with health protective behavior after controlling for demographics, education, and IQ. **Conclusion:** Executive function is associated with health behavior tendencies. If the association is causal, explanatory models of individual health behavior should be revised to account for individual differences in biologically imbued self-regulatory abilities.

Full reference: