

---

## 29.5 The role of optimistic beliefs in making health action plans

---

*Authors:* **Ridder, D.T.D. de**  
Department of Health Psychology, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

---

Research regarding the role of optimism in health behavior is not conclusive about its assumed beneficial effects. While there are indications that the impact of optimism on health behavior may relate to the typical conceptualization of optimism (e.g. whether or not realistic), there is also debate about the role of optimism relating to the stage of health behavior. Generally distinguishing between the stages of making intentions to perform health behavior (motivational stage) and implementing intentions (volitional stage), most studies consider optimism beneficial during the motivational stage. Findings regarding the role of optimism during the volitional stage are mixed, however. Some studies provide support for the idea that optimism is especially beneficial during the stage of implementing behavior (assuming that an exaggerated perception of one's possibilities contributes to actual performance of health behavior), while others maintain that optimism leads to biased perception and thus to neglect of necessary behavioral changes. The present study was designed to test the assumption of a differential effect of optimism depending on the stage of health behavior. In an experimental design (n=140) hypertensive patients were motivated by their GP (acting according to the experimental protocol) to consider both their intentions (by discussing their beliefs on adherence) and their implementation intentions (by making action plans regarding adherence). We tested whether compared to the control condition this manipulation resulted in increased motivation and increased implementation intentions and whether optimism played a crucial role in it.