

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
SEPTEMBER 20, 2018**

Study shows wellness app and 'loyalty points' fuel physical activity

A new study led by Western University shows that relatively small financial incentives – as little as pennies a day – and goal setting can increase physical activity. The findings were published today by the high impact journal *JMIR mHealth and uHealth*.

Using the *Carrot Rewards* wellness app as the measuring tool, the research team from Western and the University of British Columbia found that earning 'points' from popular loyalty rewards programs like Aeroplan, Petro-Canada, RBC and Cineplex equivalent to just four CDN cents (\$0.04) per day contributed to a five per cent overall daily increase in step count and a more pronounced 21 per cent increase among the lower active half of the study's participants.

The *Carrot Rewards* app was co-founded by Marc Mitchell, an assistant professor at Western's School of Kinesiology, and was partially funded by the Canadian, Ontario, British Columbia and Newfoundland Labrador provincial governments.

"Until recently, financial health incentive programs have shown promise but little potential for scalability given the cost of the rewards. This study adds to the understanding of how incentives can be delivered in ways that are not prohibitively costly," explains Mitchell.

The average age of the 32,229 study participants was 34 years old. Of these participants, 66 per cent were female. More than half of the participants were categorized as 'physically inactive.'

Those participants classified as 'high engagers' – nearly half (48 per cent) of the 32,229 – significantly increased their daily step counts. Those in British Columbia on average walked 739 more steps per day while those in Newfoundland & Labrador averaged 346 more steps per day.

More importantly, the group of 'high engagers' categorized as 'physically inactive' – more than a fifth (21 per cent) of the 32,229 study participants – averaged an increase of 1225 per day, or about 32%.

"Providing immediate rewards in the form of loyalty points for personalized daily step goal achievement, which are easily measured and monitored by smartphones, appears to have encouraged physical activity on a population-scale, especially for higher-risk sedentary individuals," says Mitchell. "And that's great news for all Canadians."

MEDIA CONTACT: Jeff Renaud, Senior Media Relations Officer, 519-661-2111, ext. 85165, 519-520-7281 (mobile), jrenaud9@uwo.ca, @jeffrenaud99

ABOUT WESTERN

Western University delivers an academic experience second to none. Since 1878, The Western Experience has combined academic excellence with life-long opportunities for intellectual, social and cultural growth in order to better serve our communities. Our research excellence expands knowledge and drives discovery with real-world application. Western attracts individuals with a broad worldview, seeking to study, influence and lead in the international community.

Follow Western Media Relations online:

Website: <http://communications.uwo.ca/media/>

RSS: <http://feeds.feedburner.com/MediaWesternU>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mediawesternu>