

# Saving Lives or Preventing Death: Tailoring Messages to Increase Health-Promoting Behaviors

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## **Abstract**

We examined the impact of lifesaving versus death-preventing messages on willingness to act in life-threatening contexts. In Study 1, participants learned about cancer risks from sleeping next to a cell phone and about the recommendation to keep the phone away at night, framed as *saving lives* or *preventing death*. In Study 2, participants learned about a vaccine-resistant deadly disease and a recommended vaccination framed as *saving lives* or *preventing deaths*. Participants' fear of personal death (FPD) was measured. Results indicate that message effectiveness varies with FPD levels. For low FPD individuals, death-prevention framing increased action more than lifesaving messages. Conversely, high FPD individuals responded better to lifesaving framing. However, when decisions involved others and death thoughts were distant, high FPD individuals were more affected by death-prevention framing. We propose tailoring messages to FPD levels to promote action in life-threatening situations.

**Keywords:** *Framing, Health communication, Message tailoring*

**Track:** *Consumer Behavior*