

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Live Healthy Georgia - Seniors Taking Charge: A Community Intervention Report

Georgia has the 11th fastest growing population of older adults in the country. Georgia also has the 7th highest prevalence of diabetes among older people. Among the major challenges related to aging and chronic diseases are controlling health care costs, maintaining independence, and enhancing quality of life through improved lifestyles and chronic disease management.

To begin to address some of these challenges, a partnership was created among the Division of Aging Services, Division of Public Health, Diabetes Association of Atlanta, Diabetes Technologies, Inc., University of Georgia, and the aging services network. Outcomes of the partnership include the website “Live Well Age Well” (www.livewellagewell.info) and a Community Intervention called “Seniors Taking Charge!” that support the Live Healthy Georgia campaign. The website provides information on healthy living for people aged 50 and older, and their families and caregivers. Since inception, this website has had over 4,300 unique visitors who made 6,100 visits to the site and viewed more than 19,000 different web pages.

The goal of the Community Intervention is to improve physical activity, nutrition, and diabetes self-management skills. This intervention was conducted in all 12 Planning Services Areas of Georgia that serve more than 30,000 older adults, and was evaluated in 40 Senior Centers in 815 older people (average age was 74 years, 16% men, 84% women, 44% white, 55% African American, 1% other ethnicity/race). The evaluation included pre-tests, interventions, and post-tests designed to measure improvements in lifestyle and diabetes self-management skills.

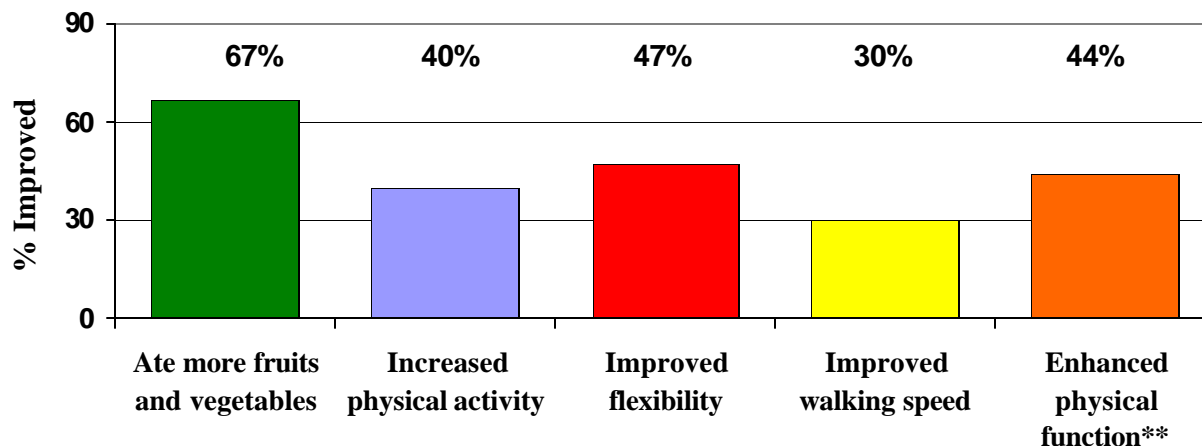
Among those with diabetes (45% of the participants), the diabetes intervention led to many improvements in nutrition, physical activity, and diabetes self-management (see table below).

	Before Community Intervention	After Community Intervention
<i>Does the participant with diabetes...</i>	5 or more days per week (%)	
• Follow a healthful eating plan	61	79
• Follow an eating plan prescribed by health care provider	40	62
• Space carbohydrates evenly	40	55
• Do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity	53	64
• Test blood sugar as recommended	58	65
• Take diabetes medications as prescribed	92	91
• Check feet	74	84

Diabetes was poorly controlled among many participants: 30% had high blood sugar and 41% had blood A1c > 7% before the intervention. A1c is the “gold standard” test of blood sugar and diabetes management. There was a decrease in A1c among the total sample of people with diabetes. Moreover, those with very poorly controlled A1c (initial A1c > 8%) had a large and clinically significant decrease in their A1c after the intervention, which can lead to decreases in healthcare costs and reduction of some consequences of diabetes such as heart disease, stroke, amputation, kidney failure, nerve damage, and blindness. The 1% decrease in A1c that occurred in these participants (initial A1c > 8%) translates into a 35% reduction in the risk for these types of diabetes-related complications and an 18% decrease in risk of fatal and non-fatal heart attacks (American Diabetes Association, 2002).

Among all of the older adult participants in the evaluation, there were also many improvements in nutrition and physical activity that can enhance well-being, including:

- **Fruit and vegetable intake:** 67% added one or more servings daily
- **Physical activity:** 40% added 10 additional minutes daily
- **Flexibility:** 47% added 1 inch or more to their reach forward from a seated position
- **Physical function:** 30% improved walking speed by 1 second or more in an 8-foot walk
- **Lower risk of nursing home placement through enhanced physical function:** 44% of those with poor physical function improved to a better category of function**



The most common reason reported by the participants for not being physically active most days of the week was having a health condition that limits activity (35%). This problem can be addressed through expansion of physical activity programs for people with various chronic conditions. The most common reason reported by the participants for not eating more fruits and vegetables was cost (23%). Cost can be addressed through expansion of the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. Many older adults with diabetes improved their diabetes self-management skills, but did not adhere to these practices on a daily basis. Thus, continued promotion of diabetes self-management skills is needed. Overall, the program was well received and more than 94% of participants rated the Community Interventions as good to excellent.

Recommendations

- Expand collaborations with community partners, universities, and the media to promote nutrition and physical activity in all older adults in Georgia.
- Increase funding to develop and implement evidence-based nutrition, physical activity, and chronic disease management interventions for older adults in Georgia.
- Provide funding for expansion of the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program in Georgia.
- Continue to develop interventions that are culturally appropriate for older adults who are of Hispanic or African-American heritage, as well as for older adults with low literacy skills.
- Expand the "Live Well Age Well" website to cover additional healthy aging topics for Georgia's older adults and their families and caregivers.

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9/1/06