

The Prevention Research Center: 10 Keys to Healthy Aging

The University of Pittsburgh's Center for Healthy Aging created the 10 Keys to Healthy Aging program to encourage healthy living among older adults. Research combines learning about the "10 keys" with education and physical activity to find the best combination for reducing participants' risk for stroke, heart failure, cancer, disability, institutionalization, and suicide. Preliminary results showed the 10 keys led to health improvements, and the information has been shared across Pennsylvania and in Europe.

Lead Agencies:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adult and Community Health, Prevention Research Centers Program

Agency Mission:

The Prevention Research Centers work as an interdependent network of community, academic, and public health partners to conduct prevention research and promote the wide use of practices proven to promote good health.

Principal Investigator:

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Partner Agency:

PRC Healthy Aging Research Network

General Description:

The 10 Keys to Healthy Aging, based on epidemiological, clinical, and laboratory studies, address 10 conditions essential for maintaining health in older adults: 1) prevent bone loss and muscle weakness, 2) control blood pressure, 3) increase physical activity, 4) regulate blood sugar, 5) stop smoking, 6) maintain social contact, 7) participate in cancer screening, 8) get regular immunizations, 9) lower cholesterol, and 10) combat depression. Researchers are collaborating with community partners to refine interventions around several of these conditions

Project staff are implementing and evaluating two interventions for about 1,000 older adults: a healthy lifestyle intervention and a brief education intervention. After

completing an initial 4-hour assessment related to the ten keys, participants are randomly assigned to an intervention group. Participants in both groups meet with a health counselor who explains the results of their assessments and offers recommendations. Participants identify one or two goals for improving their results and are referred to their doctors as needed. People in the brief education group are referred to community resources and receive follow-up calls from a health counselor every 3 months.

Adults in the healthy lifestyle intervention join in walking groups and attend group sessions about healthy food choices for controlling blood pressure and diabetes, and exercises to improve strength, flexibility, and endurance. In social activities, participants can get support from peers; practice techniques to maintain and enhance memory and other mental abilities; and learn about the risk factors conditions associated with aging. All participants will complete the assessments after the intervention and every year thereafter for 3–4 years. Post-intervention results of the 2 groups will be compared with each other and with individuals' initial assessments. Evaluators will analyze the extent to which the interventions decreased participants' risk for stroke, heart failure, cancer, disability, institutionalization, and suicide.

Excellence: What makes this project exceptional?

The 10 Keys to Healthy Aging intervention is a portable and simple method to address the leading causes of illness in older adults. The research involves older adults in every step of its development. Laypersons are recruited from the community, learn about how to prevent disease and promote health, and become Community Health Ambassadors. They work with researchers to design and test interventions and spread health messages among their peers.

Significance: How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

Older adults are at risk for heart disease and stroke, diabetes, influenza, pneumonia, disability, suicide, and other preventable conditions. However, those who engage in physical activity, healthy diets, socially and mentally stimulating activities, cancer screening, and other positive health behaviors can often maintain active and healthy lives.

Effectiveness: What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

Community Health Ambassadors have shared the research across the state of Pennsylvania and through a partnership with a multinational corporation, with corporation employees working in Europe. 1,000 older adults are participating in the second-round trials of the research project.

Innovativeness: Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

Older adults are bombarded by health messages about every aspect of life. The 10 keys intervention simplifies health messages to a consistent, evidence-based set of priorities that helps without overwhelming the audience. Older adults work alongside researchers to develop and test the 10 keys, and can attest to its effectiveness and ease of use.