

Community Gardening in a Senior Center: A Therapeutic Intervention to Improve the Health of Older Adults

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Exercise is known to provide many physical and emotional health benefits whereas physical inactivity can lead to physical deconditioning and deterioration of health. While older adults could benefit from physical exercise, many do not engage in regular physical activity. Gardening can be a source of moderate or vigorous physical activity; however access to private space for gardening may be problematic for this population. Thus, a pilot project was undertaken to examine what effect, if any, a community gardening activity at a senior center might have on the level of functional health, depression, and physical fitness for independent-living elders. This study employed a quantitative one-group, pre-test/post-test design to evaluate each of those areas. The sample consisted of six participants drawn from attendees at a senior center in upstate New York; all participants were ambulatory and lived in private homes or apartments. There was a general trend toward lower, improved, scores for most Dartmouth COOP Functional Health Assessment Charts at the post-test and most notably for Social Activities ($p = .046$). In addition, mean scores for Total Emotional Score ($p = .042$) and the Geriatric Depression Scale decreased from the pre-test to the post-test indicating an improved level of function, and the Six-Minute Walk Test increased indicating a greater distance walked and improved function. Community gardens located in senior centers represent ideal opportunities for health professionals including recreational therapists to collaborate

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