

PREFACE

The *Exercise and Nutrition Health Education Curriculum for Adults with Developmental Disabilities* is based on the successful outcomes of the innovative Health Promotion Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). This 12-week exercise program includes exercise, nutrition, and health education components. The goals of the program are to: 1) improve fitness, 2) increase knowledge about healthy lifestyles, and 3) teach family, staff, and friends how to support participants to achieve these goals.

The benefits of health promotion activities have been well-documented for the general population. However, individuals with developmental disabilities, for the most part, have not been included in health promotion activities. For people with disabilities, changes in lifestyle and environmental conditions may have the same potential to improve physical, mental, and social functioning, and prevent the onset of lifestyle-related conditions, as they do in the general population. Thus, health promotion programs designed for adults with disabilities are necessary.

In order to better understand ways to promote healthy lifestyles among adults with developmental disabilities, this program has been evaluated by several research projects. They have been conducted at UIC in the Department of Disability and Human Development by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Aging with Developmental Disabilities (RRTCADD), Center on Health Promotion for Persons with Disabilities (CHP), and the UIC Midwest Roybal Center for Health Promotion and Behavior Change. Funding is provided by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute on Aging, and The Retirement Research Foundation. The Principal Investigators for the UIC Health Promotion Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities are Tamar Heller, PhD, James H. Rimmer, PhD, and Beth Marks, RN, PhD.

Participants in the center-based UIC Health Promotion Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities participated in a comprehensive program consisting of exercise activities, nutrition and cooking classes, and health education classes with peer support.

1. The **exercise program** included an hour of physical activity three days a week to improve fitness. Emphasis is placed on cardiovascular endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility. Participants are taught how to properly use the equipment and exercise safely.
2. The **nutrition and cooking classes** were held three times a week for one hour. The modules consist of tips on healthy eating and food preparation, examination of eating routines and food labels, shopping tips, and selecting healthy foods from restaurant menus.
3. The **health education classes** met three days a week for one hour. The modules consist of activities helping participants to: understand their attitudes toward health, exercise and food; find exercises that they like to do and set goals; gain skills and knowledge about exercises and healthy eating; support each other during the course of the class; and, identify places in their community where they can exercise regularly.

The Health Promotion Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities has been tested on four groups of 32 participants from six different vocational and residential agencies in Illinois.^{1,2} Results demonstrated the following:

- greater life satisfaction and less depression,
- increased exercise knowledge,
- more positive attitudes toward exercise,
- increased confidence in ability to exercise,
- fewer barriers preventing participants from exercising,
- improved cardiovascular fitness, and
- increased muscle strength and endurance.

PREFACE, continued

CURRICULUM PREMISES

The following premises are incorporated in the *Exercise and Nutrition Health Education Curriculum*:

- people with disabilities have a right to receive education and services that promote their health,
- people can contribute to their own well-being by becoming knowledgeable about their health and health resources, and by becoming active participants in health promotion activities,
- health promotion is not a form of social control, but must be based on the needs and lifestyle preferences of individuals, and
- support from caregivers and increased access to exercise activities promote exercise adherence.

The curriculum incorporates the following concepts that affect a participant's ability to change health behaviors: *self-efficacy*,^{3,4} *social support* (including caregiver support), *self-advocacy*, *choice-making*, and *leadership development*. This builds on the RRTCADD's *Person-Centered Planning for Later Life: A Curriculum for Adults with Mental Retardation*⁵ and *Making Choices as We Age: A Peer Training Program*.⁶ An emphasis is placed on knowledge related to the benefits of exercise and good nutrition, available exercise and nutrition options in the community, personal choices regarding one's preferred lifestyle, and support from friends and relatives.

The curriculum is a 12-week program with three 1-hour modules per week. Each module covers a specific topic. The modules are designed to build upon the previous lessons and some of the topics may overlap with earlier modules. This allows participants to continuously review material throughout the program.

The format of the curriculum encourages you to reproduce the parts you need at a particular time. In addition, a CD with participant handouts and worksheets that accompany each module is available. We encourage duplication of the handouts and worksheets so each participant will have a personalized notebook (see pp. 7-12). Each module contains a facilitator script and references, along with participant handouts and worksheets.

CURRICULUM DESIGN

The revised *Exercise and Nutrition Health Education Curriculum* is based on the 5 stages of change in the Transtheoretical Model of Change - *precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance*.^{7,8} Each stage is part of a continuum of readiness to change and includes specific topics designed to provide participants with options for changing their behavior.

Phase 1 - Precontemplation Stage - People are often unaware or under-aware of the need to change their behavior. The modules focus on increasing the participant's understanding of health, exercise, and nutrition, along with making decisions about one's health.

Phase 2 - Contemplation Stage - People are aware that they should change their behavior and are seriously thinking about change, but have not made a commitment to take action. In this section, participants consider lifestyle change and assess their exercise and nutrition behaviors.

Phase 3 - Preparation Stage - People are ready to take action and change a specific behavior. Classes focus on setting goals and examining barriers and influences that may affect their ability to exercise or eat a more nutritious diet.

Phase 4 - Action Stage - People are taking action and have changed their behavior(s). Participants are exercising and trying to include healthy foods in their diets. Classes focus on reinforcing new behaviors to maintain their exercise and nutrition goals.

Phase 5 - Maintenance Stage - People are considering ways to prevent relapse. Classes focus on reviewing what they have learned and different ways to maintain their program. After the 12-week structured program of classes aimed at teaching and supporting people to feel more confident to engage in regular physical activity and make healthy food choices, people are encouraged to continue with classes as a part of lifelong learning. The Lifelong Learning Series in [Appendix A](#) incorporates 23 modules developed with participants in the UIC Health Promotion Program to compliment the 36 modules in the 12-week program to sustain long-term adoption of healthy lifestyles.