The Relationship between Physical Activity Participation and Risk of Cognitive Impairment in Old Adults

Search Terms: physical activity, dementia, older adults, and cognitive function

Years: 2001-2013

Databases: EBSCO and CINAHL

Number of Articles: 8

Summary of Research Findings:
Recent statistics show that there are approximately 24 million people living with some forms of dementia today (Best-Martini, Weeks, Wirth, 2010). It could be expected that when people live longer, the number of older adults with dementia will increase. This literature review included eight articles discussing the relationship between physical activity participation and cognitive function in older adults. It was found that physical activity participation is associated with decreasing risk of cognitive impairment in community-dwelling older adults (Laurin et al., 2001).

In fact, four of the reviewed articles found that older adults who were physically active and involved in higher levels of physical activity showed better scores on cognitive function tests (Laurin et al., 2001; Podewils et al., 2005; Sumic et al., 2007; Perrot et al., 2009). In addition, three articles showed that gender, age, socioeconomic status, level of education, and residential area were associated with levels of physical activity participation (Laurin et al., 2001; Sumic et al., 2007; Perrot et al., 2009). One article showed that participants who developed dementia were older, less educated, less physically active, and scored poorer on cognitive scores at baseline than participants who did not develop dementia (Podewils et al., 2005).

Furthermore, in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, one study studying walking as the key indicator found that participants, who engaged in walking frequently in their residential area, had higher cognitive test scores (Prohaska et al., 2009).

Knowledge Translation Plan:
Physical education could improve participants’ understandings of the benefits of physical activity participation, and hence increase their motivation of living a more active lifestyle. Helping participants identify a suitable location in their neighborhood will increase participation in physical activity. Although the recommendation of levels of physical activity for older adults from the World Health Organization is 30 minutes a day, five days a week, recreational therapists should create an intervention according to people’s needs and abilities. In addition, recreational therapists need to help people negotiate barriers and constraints in physical activity participation.
References: