

Nutrition and Wellness Education for Active Seniors

A Community Oriented Primary Care
Project for Sycamore, IL

Abstract

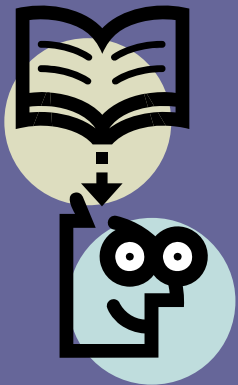
The link between disease and nutrition is strong, with many major disease processes having a fundamental component that directly relates to a person's diet and lifestyle. Cholesterol, fats, fiber and antioxidants are discussed daily in the popular media, with much conflicting information being presented.

The purpose of my project is to educate active seniors in the current nutritional guidelines and how nutrition relates to chronic disease prevention and management. I intend to evaluate these seniors' knowledge of nutrition and health risk factors before and after a series of four educational encounters.

Background

Patient education is an easily overlooked cornerstone of healthcare. Complex medical conditions are more prevalent among the over 65 age group, and such patients may not have an adequate depth of understanding of the major risk factors in their lives and from their lifestyles.

For some patients eager to self-inform, the myriad information sources can be confusing and even incorrect. It is important that appropriate information and clear explanations be available to patients to ensure appropriate compliance and better quality health care.



Background cont.

Many health risks and health disease conditions are more prevalent in the geriatric population. Established coronary disease and stroke risk factors are frequently found in the over 65 age group.

For example, age itself is a risk factor, and NHANES and the Framingham Studies have found hypertension control in this age group to be particularly important. Additionally, all other major risk factors for heart disease and stroke are found in this age group as well.

Background cont.



Geriatric patients also may feel overwhelmed at the complex array of screenings and tests requested by their physician, and may have little insight into the benefit of such health maintenance tools. It is crucial that the explanation for the importance of such tests be elucidated.

Methods

The project is designed as a 4 session lecture-based class structure where information regarding nutrition and lifestyle choices is provided to 15 active senior citizens in Sycamore, IL. Education focuses on ways to maintain wellness and lifestyle/nutrition modifications they can embrace to prevent or lessen common diseases and risk factors of the geriatric population.



Community of Sycamore, IL

Methods cont.

Four classes were held at the DeKalb Community Center, the first focusing on general health maintenance and physician-guided screenings; the second focused on heart disease. The third class dealt primarily with stroke and stroke prevention and overlapped largely with class #2. The last class discussed diabetes mellitus type II and its risk factors, and the interplay with the other disease states discussed.

Methods cont.

All information to be provided was obtained from the Up To Date online resource. This ensures the most recent guidelines are discussed.

Classes were primarily a lecture based format, with interactive questioning and discussion encouraged.

A survey was administered prior to the first session which assessed participants' attitudes about nutrition and common disease states. The same survey was administered at the close of the final session to assess if participants' attitudes had changed during the scope of the classes.

No identifying information was obtained, and all information was destroyed after tabulation.

Topics



I. General wellness, health screenings and tests

I. Heart Disease and risk factors

II. Stroke and risk factors

III. Diabetes Mellitus Type II

Results

The initial survey (pre classes) had an N of 13, but due to significant flux in attendance the post class survey only had an N of 10. Still, attitudes regarding nutrition and major disease conditions did not show a significant change. Only the informative questions showed a difference. One such example showed only 2 participants able to correctly identify a “normal” blood pressure goal of 120/80 pre class, and 9 able to do so after classes.

[Please refer to Tables 1 and 2 for pre and post class survey data.]

Conclusions

Overall, participants showed moderate to good attitudes of nutrition and a moderate level of comfort with knowledge of diabetes and the risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

Participants verbally expressed an increase in their depth of knowledge of these factors post classes although the attitude surveys did not necessarily reflect that change. This is likely due to the design of the surveys to test attitudes about nutrition and risk factors, rather than gauging the knowledge base pre and post classes.

However, based on the positive feedback from participants, including several who verbalized adopting positive lifestyle changes, the informative class sessions will be viewed by this project coordinator as a success.

Resources Provided to Participants

- www.familydoctor.org
- www.diabetes.org
- www.americanheart.org
- handouts assembled from Up To Date information, as well as patient handouts from the aforementioned websites

[Please refer to Appendices for handouts]

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