

# Seniors' Perceptions of Aging Well: Implications for Brain Health Promotion

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# Background

- In U.S., 5 million people with Alzheimer's Disease (AD), by 2050, 11-16 million  
(Alzheimer's Association, 2007)
- 25% U.S. adults >65 yrs. with cognitive decline (Unverzagt et al., 2001)
- Major causes of functional disability, decreased independence, compromised quality of life
- Economic burden



# Background

- Recent research suggests lifestyle behaviors may reduce risk for cognitive disorders:
  - Physical Activity
  - Heart-Healthy Diet
  - Social Engagement

(CDC & the Alzheimer's Association, 2007; Colcombe & Kramer, 2003; Colcombe et al., 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; Laurin, Verreault, Lindsay, MacPherson, & Rockwood, 2001).

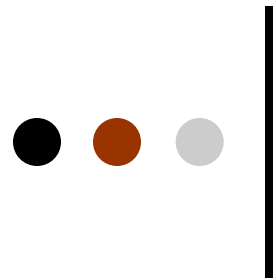


# Background

- June 2007, Alzheimer's Association & CDC released scientific review report with a ...

“Call to action for implementing a coordinated approach for moving cognitive health into public health practice”

*(National Public Health Road Map to Maintaining Cognitive Health, 2007)*



# Purpose

- Conduct formative research to gather ideas for cognitive health promotion among general public & older adults
- Regard for diversity & cultural differences
- Targeting & tailoring implications  
(Kreuter & Wray, 2003)
- 9 U.S. sites in the CDC funded Healthy Aging Research Network (HAN)



# Methods

- 9-item FG Discussion Guide
- 20-item FG Participant Survey
- USC IRB approval obtained
- November 2005, pilot test conducted
- Minimal modifications to protocols or guide
- Recruited participants through USC Office for the Study of Aging



# Methods

- February – March 2006, 9 focus groups:
  - 5 African American (n=42)
  - 4 White (n=41)
- Held at various urban & rural community senior centers
- \$30 gift card incentives
- Audio taped & manual notes (90-120min.)





# Methods

- Survey data entered into EpiInfo, exported to SAS
- Audio tapes transcribed verbatim, verified imported into AtlasTi
- 2 teams developed qualitative codebooks & combined them to form master
- 2 coders independently coded transcripts
- .80 inter-rater agreement



## Results: Sample (n=83)

- 85.0% Female
- 51.8% African American
- 68.3% 65-84 yrs., mean =  $72.0 \pm 9.97$
- 26.8% < High school
- 30.5 % High school degree
- 26.8% Some college/voc-tech



## Results: Sample (n=83)

- 50.6% Rural residence\*
- 49.4% Urban residence\*
- 42.7% Widowed
- 36.6% Married
- 52.2% Annual Income < \$20,000
- 30.0% Annual Income \$20,000-\$39,999

\* self identified, undefined



# Results: Characteristics of Aging Well

## Overall Themes:

- Socially active, involved
- Active spiritual life, prayer, gratitude
- Not worrying
- Not taking medications
- Traveling (for leisure)



## Participant Quotes

“I really think that’s (faith & prayer) very important too because we know that the body is decaying... we are getting older. We’re born to die.”

“...I’ll be 72 ... and I don’t take no medicine.”

“I’m the only one in my graduating class that don’t take high blood pressure medication.”



# Results: Aging Well, African Americans

## Themes:

- Church attendance, involvement
- “Sharp,” good memory
- Few health problems, doc visits
- Good mobility (“getting around”)
- Independence (driving, living alone, working)



## Participant Quotes

“... she gets around better than the average teenager...”

“I can drive and carry myself wherever I want to go.”

“You know, I talked to a guy yesterday and he’s in his early 70’s and you may think this is far-fetched, but this guy said, “I have never been tired.” He goes and he still works. He does everything.”



# Results: Aging Well, Whites

## Themes:

- Positive outlook, humor to cope
- Longevity, heredity/genetics
- Physical activity, exercise, staying active





## Participant Quotes

**P1:** “My Dad was 100 and my Mother was 102.”

**P2:** “No wonder you are at your age now.”

**P3:** “That’s why she’s so good.”

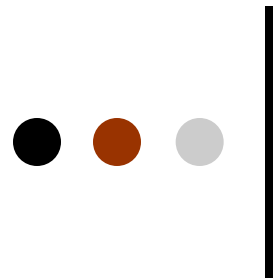
**P2:** “That’s why she’s good...you got it on both sides.”



# Participant Quotes

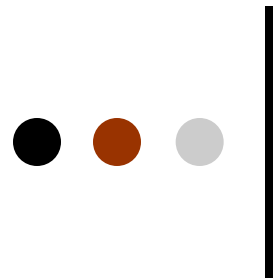
“If you have a good mental outlook you’re probably going to be active and you’re probably going to eat reasonably well.”

“I had a sister...she died a few years ago. And she never let nothing worry her. She never did let nothing worry her. And she never had a headache in her life and she lived to be 90-something years old.”



# Limitations

- Convenience sample, small n
- Self selection, senior center participants
- Exploratory, not confirmatory but suggestive
- FG format may have inhibited discussion or allowed for “dominate talkers”
- Subjectivity in coding/interpretation of “meanings”



# Implications

- Overall, absence of perceptions about the role of lifestyle behaviors and relationship to cognitive health
- Variation in perceptions of aging well by race provides opportunities for tailoring messages & materials
- Need for culturally relevant physical activity & nutrition messages & materials
- Additional formative research needed



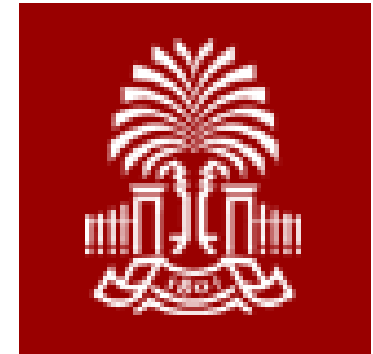
## In Their Own Words . . .

*“I’m 80 and I play in a band and I shake at both ends.”*





# Contact Info



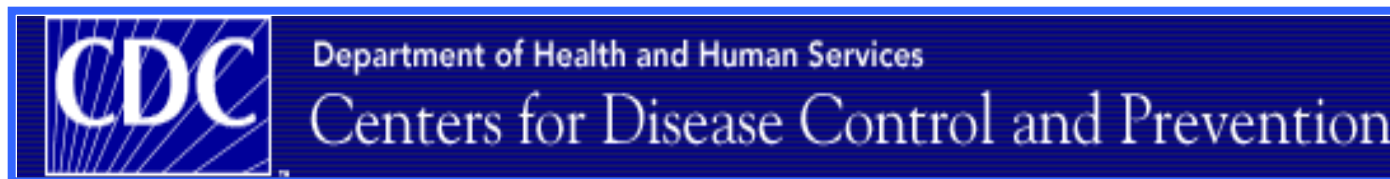
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