Connecting Brain Health & Physical Activity
Online Information and Caregiver Experiences

Our goal for this project was to understand what and how much information about the connection between physical activity and brain health is being communicated to the public. We also wanted to understand how this information was received by caregivers of people with Alzheimer’s disease.

WHAT WE FOUND

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Caregivers Experienced...</th>
<th>Online Information Included...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited Exposure to Brain Health and Physical Activity Connection</td>
<td>12.9% of sample Explicitly Connected Brain Health &amp; Physical Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Messages about Brain Health and Physical Activity Connection</td>
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Messages Explicitly Linking Brain Health and Physical Activity used varying terms:
- “cognitive improvements in terms of fitness”
- “physical activity, such as swimming, regular walking and even dancing, may substantially reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease in older individuals.”
- “exercise can keep your brain sharp”
- “…physical activity has shown benefit on cognition, mood, and quality of life in individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or mild cognitive impairment”

BACKGROUND
Evidence suggests that regular physical activity delays the incidence of dementia and onset of cognitive decline associated with aging (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008). Mass media coverage on how to reduce the risk of cognitive decline may not match the science on this topic.

WHAT WE DID
In this two phase research study, we first reviewed messages related to physical activity and aging distributed by physical activity organizations. Second, we held two focus groups with caregivers to understand their thoughts, perceptions, and responses to information about physical activity, aging and brain health.
### Caregivers Experienced...

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<tr>
<th>Skepticism regarding Credibility of Information</th>
<th>Online Information Included...</th>
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- Content explicitly linking physical activity and brain health **varied significantly by publishing organization**.

- **27.3%** of content published by research institutions made the connection between physical activity and brain health.
  - **21.7%** of the content published by physical activity organizations, and
  - **9.3%** of content published by government sources.

- **Presence of Expert Accounts and Citations**
  - **40.6%** of web articles included quotes and information from experts
  - **31.6%** of web articles included formal citations to scientific research
  - **51.6%** of web articles included links to and mention of specific scientific research

### TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- **Very few** of the messages reviewed discussed the physical activity - brain health connection.

- Caregivers expressed the need for credible information from trusted experts and indicated a preference for information from health care professionals.

- Results suggest the potential for collaboration between physical activity organizations/specialists, aging and brain health researchers, and medical practitioners for unified health promotion messaging.

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH GROUP

The South Carolina Healthy Brain Research Network (SC-HBRN) aims to advance public health research and translation related to cognitive health and healthy aging. The SC-HBRN conducts research, supports scholars, and engages with community partners.

For more information visit: [http://prevention.sph.sc.edu/projects/braincenter.html](http://prevention.sph.sc.edu/projects/braincenter.html)

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