

Fitness programs for minority adults lack cultural relevance, study finds

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Many leading causes of death are linked to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, including inadequate physical activity. Adults in minority populations have lower levels of physical activity and higher rates of preventable deaths, according to the Department of Health & Human Services. In a new study, University of Missouri researchers found that minority adults who received exercise interventions increased their physical activity levels. However, these interventions are not culturally tailored to best assist minority populations in improving overall health.

Conn conducted an analysis of more than 100 studies that tested exercise interventions in 21,151 participants from [minority populations](#). The majority of the supervised exercise studies included short-term programs with weekly exercise sessions, lasting an average of 12 weeks.

"In reviewing the studies, we were surprised at how infrequently the researchers culturally tailored the motivational interventions," said Vicki Conn, associate dean for research and Potter-Brinton professor in the MU Sinclair School of Nursing. "For example, in the majority of interventions for African Americans, there is no evidence that African Americans helped design the study, recruit participants or deliver the programs. This reveals a challenge in this area of science – although many researchers are concerned about increasing exercise in minority populations, interventions are not being culturally tailored to these populations."

Participants in supervised exercise interventions experienced modest

improvements in fitness. The positive effects could be augmented with more frequent and varied exercise sessions and the use of culturally relevant approaches, Conn said.

"People are always interested in whether exercise is going to help people lose weight," Conn said. "Although we found small reductions in weight among study participants, perhaps more interesting is that throughout the 12-week studies, people in the control group gained weight. It could be that exercise is more important to prevent weight gain more so than to help people lose weight."

Prevention of weight gain is incredibly important because minorities have higher rates of obesity compared to the majority population. Obesity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, which are significant public health problems for minority [adults](#).

More information: The study, "Physical Activity Interventions with Healthy Minority Adults: Meta-Analysis of Behavior and Health Outcomes," is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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