

VA's 'Healthy Teaching Kitchens' benefit from holistic approach

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Over the next decade, older adults will grow to become 20 percent of the US population. A new paper in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* found Healthy Teaching Kitchen programs are great vehicles for nutrition education specifically among older veterans.

Veterans Affairs' Healthy Teaching Kitchen is an interactive [nutrition education](#) program offered by the Veterans Health Administration's Nutrition and Food Services Department that addresses several aging-related issues like social connection, [nutrition](#), and [self-care](#).

"Each class, we learn, cook, and eat," one veteran said, adding they enjoyed "having the cooking steps explained as they were done and being able to eat it."

"It showed me that I can plan and make my meal with healthy choices [without getting] real expensive," said another.

Nutrition needs to be supported by a high quality diet that meets requirements for both micronutrients (e.g., vitamins C, A, D, calcium, iron) and macronutrients (e.g., protein, whole grains, carbs). This is especially important for [older adults](#) because poor nutrition increases the risk of aging-related issues like osteoporosis, muscle weakness, and falls.

The authors suggest nutrition education for older adults is improved by taking a holistic approach. By applying the [5M Care Philosophy framework](#) that provides a categorical structure for older adults' complex

health needs—Mind, Multi-complexity, Medications, Mobility, and what Matters Most—the issues affecting older adults can be easily addressed.

"Healthy Teaching Kitchens not only focus on participants' knowledge, but also on supporting practical skills such as [kitchen](#) setup, meal experience, grocery shopping, label reading, meal planning, and budgeting," explained author Marissa Black, MD, MPH, Division of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine, Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center, Puget Sound Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA.

Programming through group classes can address social isolation or be tailored to individuals with [mental health issues](#) and/or cognitive impairment to address the "Mind" category. Given many older adults take more than five medications simultaneously or specific medications that affect nutrition, [teaching](#) how diet, disease, and medications interact and affect participants' daily choices is key for the "Medications" category. Authors found using this simple framework for future nutrition and cooking educational programming may benefit the geriatric population.

The program got largely positive reviews from its attendees.

"I feel very blessed and fortunate to have experienced this," one said in the review process. "As I see it, the teachers—while not being aware of it—were actually doing ministry. I don't mean religious; ministry to me is when people act out and share their skills and time with others. They are acting in love, and that is what life is all about."

The Healthy Teaching Kitchen program at the VA is part of the Teaching Kitchen Collaborative, a collaboration through the Harvard School of Public Health and the Culinary Institute of America with the goal of learning best practices and expanding research of Teaching

Kitchen programs. The collaborative plans to do future research in this area.

More information: *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2019.11.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.11.003)

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