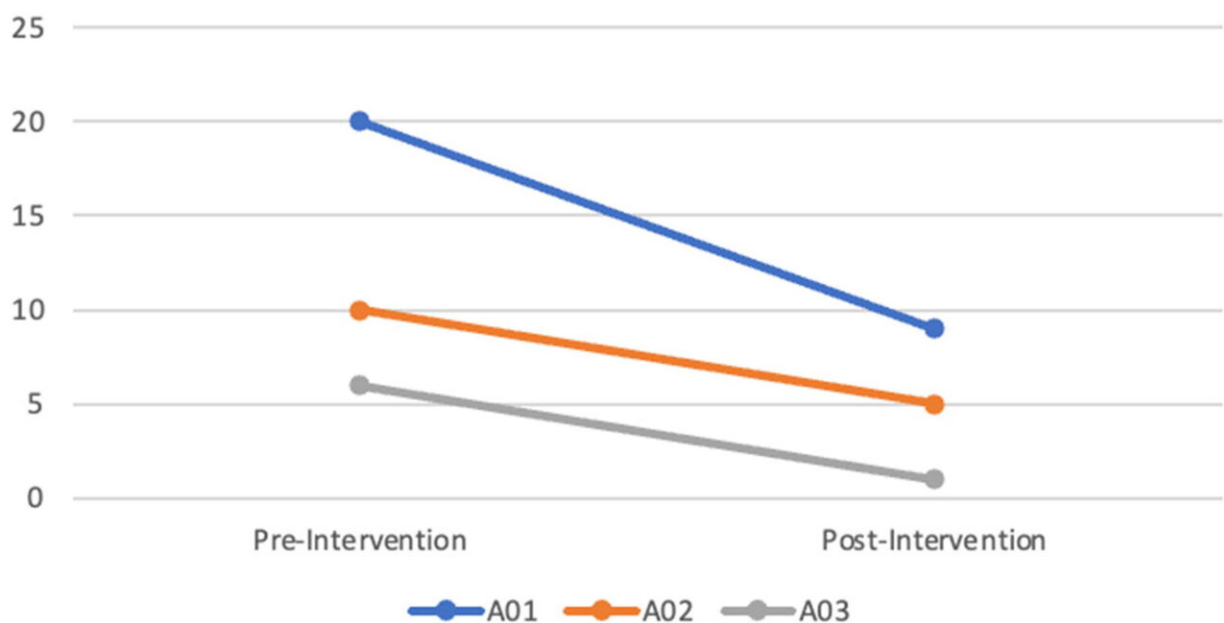


Early study shows health benefits of creative arts therapies and nutrition education for postmenopausal women

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Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Credit: *Art Therapy* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2023.2267987

Transition to the menopausal stage of women's lives can be a negative experience for women, with changes in emotional well-being and cardiovascular health that impact their quality of life. A recent study from Drexel University's College of Nursing and Health Professions explored a new way to ease the transition with an art therapy intervention

to address the health needs of overweight, postmenopausal women.

Published in [Art Therapy](#), the [pilot study](#) tested the feasibility of an intervention of combined [nutrition education](#) and creative arts therapies (art therapy and dance/movement therapy) to address cardiometabolic risk and psychosocial well-being for overweight, postmenopausal women.

The study showed the integrated approach was beneficial for the participants' psychosocial well-being, with significant improvements in the areas of quality of life, self-efficacy, stress, anxiety, and body image. All participants also showed decreased body mass index (BMI) and blood pressure readings.

"We learned that the participants—being part of a relatively understudied and neglected population: women who are overweight and in the post-menopause stage of life—appreciated having a special time and space set apart just for them that permitted mindful art, writing, and movement experiences," said Rebekka Dieterich-Hartwell, Ph.D., lead author and research fellow in the College of Nursing and Health Professions.

Three participants attended a 16-week online intervention called I2CAN (Integrative Intervention with Creative Arts therapies and Nutrition). Participants who were postmenopausal and over a BMI of 25Kg/m^2 were selected for this study. The sessions were facilitated by a nutritionist and two creative arts therapists—a dance movement therapist and an art therapist—weekly on a secure videoconferencing platform.

The sessions alternated weekly between nutrition and creative arts therapies. The creative arts therapy sessions focused on quality of life, emotional regulation, body image, and stress management and included a verbal introduction to the session's theme, a movement warm-up relating

to the theme (stretching, breathing, light movements), an art therapy directive (collage, scribble drawing, etc.), journaling, a movement cool-down, and verbal processing.

The nutrition education sessions included goal setting and topics such as [healthy food](#) and beverage choices, portion sizes, food groups, and hydration. All three participants reported multiple health benefits at the end of the study.

Participants answered standardized pre- and post-intervention questionnaires on quality of life, stress, [body image](#), and other topics. Physical measures included height, weight, BMI, and blood pressure. Researchers analyzed the data through descriptive statistics changes in biomarkers, as well as standardized surveys of well-being and mood.

Additionally, the research team interviewed the participants at the end of the study to learn about their experiences and collect field notes from the creative arts [therapy](#) sessions throughout the 16-week process.

"While this was a very small sample and the findings cannot be generalized, they indicate that a multimodal intervention with educational, expressive, and creative components can be beneficial for physiological and psychosocial well-being of [postmenopausal women](#) who have an elevated BMI and at-risk for cardiovascular disease," said Dieterich-Hartwell.

The researchers note that this population is often overlooked, and this study suggests that an integrative approach with attention to both physical and psychosocial needs can have an overall positive health impact and give voice to this particular group, according to the co-authors and [principal investigators](#), Girija Kaimal, EdD, an associate professor, and Deeptha Sukumar, Ph.D., an associate professor, both in the College of Nursing and Health Professions.

To further this research, the team is beginning a larger, randomized control trial for the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Commonwealth Universal Research Enhancement (CURE) grant program beginning in January 2024. This larger trial will help the research team to understand the impact of the integrative approach relative to nutrition education alone.

More information: Rebekka Dieterich-Hartwell et al, A Creative Arts Therapy and Nutrition Education Approach for Postmenopausal Women, *Art Therapy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/07421656.2023.2267987](https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2023.2267987)

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