

FC5: The Maintain Your Brain online multidomain intervention for dementia risk reduction: qualitative exploration of lifestyle changes made, continued, or declined, and why

Authors: Anne-Nicole Casey¹, Tiffany Chau¹, Megan Heffernan¹, Henry Brodaty¹

¹Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing (CHeBA), University of New South Wales (UNSW) Sydney, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Objective: Explore end-user evaluations and feedback focused on lifestyle change in a large-scale multidomain online intervention targeting modifiable risk factors for dementia.

Methods: Online survey and semi-structured interviews at conclusion of the Maintain Your Brain (MYB) randomized controlled trial. Participants were 55-77 years of age at baseline, and had engaged in assessments, brain training, nutrition and physical activity, and mental health modules over three years. Of 5,260 participants invited, 2,386 completed online surveys and 1,589 of these respondents provided free text comments. Nearly 250 survey respondents agreed to be contacted for additional interviews; 70 of these were invited, 40 interviewed. Survey respondents and interview completers endorsed whether they had made lifestyle changes because of MYB participation and whether they would continue healthy lifestyle changes going forward. Interview participants endorsed whether they thought similar programs can be useful in delaying or preventing dementia, whether their views regarding this type of program had changed over time, answered open-ended follow-up questions and provided additional feedback. Data were summarized using descriptive statistics and explored using multiple qualitative methods.

Results: Of survey respondents, 90.5% endorsed intention to continue a healthier lifestyle; 63.2% endorsed that lifestyle changes had occurred. Interview participants thought similar programs could be useful in delaying or preventing dementia, but some were unsure. Trial participation had not changed many individuals' views about online lifestyle programs. Survey free-text and interview comments indicated diversity in pre-intervention knowledge, lifestyle and health-related behavior. Many respondents reported improved knowledge and awareness, some detailed relevant and continued lifestyle change. Those who were already well informed and/or leading healthy lifestyles explained that trial participation had confirmed their existing practices. Trial characteristics, personal characteristics, social relationships and significant events impacted whether respondents had made and/or continued changes. More flexible, adaptive individually tailored goals and timely feedback were requested to better support change.

Conclusion: Surveyed participants who engaged in the 3-year MYB online multidomain dementia risk reduction program reported lifestyle changes and intention to continue having a healthier lifestyle. Older adults in this study suggested that similar online programs need to provide flexible, individualized guidance and feedback to support lifestyle change.