

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a University of Missouri Extension pilot program, *Taking Care of You: Body-Mind-Spirit*, in reducing perceived stress and improving lifestyle behaviors compared to the effectiveness of a strength training program. The pilot program included research-based strategies from the field of positive psychology with a strong focus on mindfulness.

Participants both programs completed surveys at baseline (time 0) (n = 477), immediately following the programs (time 1) (n = 390) and three months following the programs (time 2) (n = 299). Surveys at each timepoint assessed participants' perceived stress levels, tobacco use and health promoting lifestyle behaviors.

Too few tobacco users were identified for this outcome measure to be included in the analyses. Participants of both program groups showed significant improvements in stress levels and health promoting lifestyle behaviors from time 0 to time 1. However, improvements in health promoting lifestyle behaviors, with the exception of physical activity and social health behaviors, from time 0 to time 1 were significantly greater for the participants of the pilot program. In comparison to the strength training program, the pilot program showed significantly greater improvements across all three timepoints and from time 0 to time 2 for all outcome measures with the exception of physical activity and social health behaviors. Participants of both programs significantly maintained improvements made as a result their program participation.

This study adds to the limited amount research evaluating the effectiveness of stress management programs in improving health behaviors.