

Dance and Peer Support to Improve Diabetes Outcomes in African American Women

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this pilot study was to test a dance intervention and explore the role of peer support to improve the diabetes outcomes of A1c, weight, body fat, and blood pressure in African American women with Type 2 diabetes.

Methods: This study was conducted in a community-based outpatient clinic. A mixed methods design was used: 46 women, 26 to 83 years, were randomized to either the 12-week dance group or usual care group. Both between and intra-individual group differences were analyzed from baseline to 12 weeks. Focus group interviews explored the role of peer support through semi-structured discussions for the women enrolled in the dance group.

Results: Results showed significant group mean differences in systolic BP and body fat. Paired t tests showed significant reductions in all the diabetes outcomes for the dance group and significant increases in A1c and systolic BP for the usual care group. The emergent themes of the focus groups were that a diabetes diagnosis was devastating and changing eating habits and taking medications was often difficult. Peer support in the dance group was expressed as camaraderie, enjoyment, and laughter, which fostered attendance.

Conclusions: Dancing two times per week for 12 weeks produced significant group differences in systolic BP and body fat and significant intra-individual changes. The implications are that dancing in a supportive environment with peers may be an effective strategy for diabetes educators to help those with diabetes to become more physically active and improve diabetes outcomes and overall health.