“Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder”: A low-risk solution for women with incontinence

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Background

- More than half of women over age 65 have bladder and/or bowel incontinence but most don’t talk to a doctor or health care provider about it
- Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder (MOM) is a workshop that teaches women how to make changes to improve symptoms:
  - Pelvic floor muscle exercises (Kegels)
  - Changes to fiber intake to treat constipation or loose stools
  - Changes to fluid intake to avoid irritating the bladder
- MOM is led by someone from the community (2 day training)
- MOM helps women set goals and find solutions themselves
- 3 sessions, each 2 hours long, every other week for one month

Objective

To determine the impact of Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder (MOM) on bladder and bowel leakage (incontinence) among older women using a randomized, waitlist control trial.

Methods & Materials

- Identified 6 Wisconsin communities willing to test the program
- Women had to be age ≥ 50, and have bladder and/or bowel incontinence
- Research team screened 166 women, 122 women were consented, 121 randomized (62 treatment, 59 control), approximately 8-12 per community

Funding

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Results

Findings/Pathways

- The workshop also changed behavior: Women in the treatment group were much more likely to do Kegel exercises often or always than women in the control group, not just immediately after the workshop, but even three months later!
- Study Design: Randomly assigning women to treatment and control groups is important for the study design, but no one wants to sign up for a study where there is only a 50/50 chance that you will get the treatment! So we did a “waitlist control” design, which means that everyone in the study completed the MOM workshop. Women assigned to the treatment group did the workshop in the spring; the control group did the workshop in the fall, after the study was over.

Limitations (weaknesses):
- Limited time (only 4 months)
- Not much diversity in our sample
- No clinical assessments

Strengths:
- Random assignment to the treatment and control group is the strongest study design possible for testing a treatment
- Low rate of attrition (drop out)

Conclusions

Bladder and bowel leakage symptoms can be improved through a program run completely without health care professionals.

The Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA) already disseminates similar programs, so this program can be disseminated throughout Wisconsin with WIHA’s help.

Future research will examine long-term impact and impact in other populations.