

## WHAT IS IT?

The **HealthMatters™ Program** is an evidence-based program created for people with development disabilities and is designed as a 12-week program with three lessons per week. The workshop provides opportunities for ongoing learning strategies to modify or change health behaviors. It includes strategies to improve participants' self-confidence to change behavior by maximizing individual involvement in planning and implementing exercise and nutrition goals and promoting health rather than curing illness. Techniques such as problem-solving, conflict resolution, role-playing, and using open-ended questions facilitate the learning process.

The health education components help participants understand their attitudes toward health, exercise, and food, find enjoyable exercises, set goals, gain knowledge about exercises and healthy eating, support each other during the class, and identify community resources for regular exercise. The classes also include exercises that emphasize flexibility, cardiovascular endurance, balance, and strength. Nutrition components include cooking classes with tips on healthy eating and food preparation, examination of eating routines and food labels, shopping trips, and selecting healthy foods from restaurant menus.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

The program was initially designed for people with developmental disabilities but has also been used with high school students, transition-age adolescents, and older adults with various physical, psychological, and intellectual disabilities. It is particularly beneficial for people with limited or inaccurate knowledge about the body and the causes of disease.



## WHAT DOES IT DO?

The curriculum incorporates concepts that affect a participant's ability to change health behaviors, including self-efficacy, social support, self-advocacy, choice-making, and leadership development. It emphasizes knowledge related to the benefits of exercise and good nutrition, available exercise and nutrition options in the community, personal choices regarding lifestyle, and support from friends and relatives.

Research study results demonstrated the following outcomes: greater life satisfaction, increased exercise knowledge, more positive attitudes towards exercise, greater confidence and ability to exercise, fewer socio-emotional barriers to exercising, improved cardiovascular fitness, and increased muscle strength and endurance.



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