

Abstracts of oral presentations

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Dietary Support for Community-dwelling Elderly: Co-designing a Virtual Coach

Nutrition during the senior years is important for sustaining health, preventing disease and disability, and, hence, maintaining independence and quality of life. Factors influencing food choice among community-dwelling older adults differ from the general studied population of adults, and include for example a loss of appetite and mobility limitations. However, most dietary interventions do not consider such factors. Earlier studies show that virtual coaches could be an effective medium for community-dwelling older adults, however, no research has examined their preferences regarding these coaches in the context of nutrition. Hence, in our study we aimed to identify and understand dietary barriers and facilitators, and provide design considerations for a virtual coach. Data was gathered through five co-creation sessions with community-dwelling elderly in the Netherlands (2 groups, total N=13). Participants were asked to fill in a seven-day diary prior to the first session. The first session focused on healthy living and healthy eating, the second session on dietary advice and the last session focused on a virtual dietary coach. A thematic approach was used to guide the analysis. According to the participants, healthy living centered around the following key themes: the social context, lack of physical limitations, a positive mindset, and nature. Healthy eating entailed both balance and mindfulness. Barriers towards healthy eating were reduced autonomy, physical limitations, and loneliness. Although preferences for the design for the virtual coach varied greatly, there were five commonly preferred design characteristics: Friendly, warm, trustworthy, concerned, and competent. To conclude, food choice among community-dwelling elderly is determined by a complex interaction between multiple factors. The desire for autonomy and the desire to connect are central factors influencing their dietary pattern, and reflect preferred design characteristics for a virtual coach which should be considered when designing an intervention for this group.