

Therapeutic adjuncts to mainstream interventions for behavioral health (BH) conditions have demonstrated efficacy in improving the health, functioning, and well-being for older adults and for people living with physical disabilities. These non-mainstream approaches are a low-cost way to have a significant impact in improving quality of life, social connectedness, and reducing BH symptoms. While therapeutic interventions are generally low risk, it is important to carefully consider any possible risks and side-effects before implementing. Although some of these interventions can be self-applied, many of these require training and certification for a provider to be recognized as a practitioner of the art¹.

Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAIs) and Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): AAI is a broad term that includes a variety of ways in which *animals intentionally engage with humans in a supportive or comforting manner*. AAT refers to a type of AAI which has the express purpose of improving the social, emotional, physical, and/or cognitive wellbeing of people through specific types of interactions with trained therapists and certified therapy animals².

Benefits: Preliminary findings suggest that AAIs and AAT in long term care settings can be beneficial to both caregivers and residents, and can reduce symptoms of anxiety, social isolation and loneliness³, blood pressure⁴ and the behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD), especially depression and agitation⁵.

Programs: The Oregon Humane Society provides a list of service dog training [resources](#).



Art Therapy: Art Therapy reframes the later years of life as ones of continued growth and the capacity to learn, and can specifically address the impact of cognitive, physical, and psychosocial challenges encountered by older adults and people living with physical disabilities. Emphasis is placed on *action-oriented sensory stimulation, such as arranging, touching, gluing, constructing, painting, and forming*, empowering participants in the therapeutic process, focusing and redirecting attention, and influencing emotions and behavior.

Benefits: Creativity via art has been shown to reduce symptoms of mood and sleep disorders, increase positive outlook, boost the immune system, and improve memory and other cognitive functions⁶.

Programs: There are programs around the world that engage people with dementia in art, including a fine-arts program being facilitated at multiple locations in Oregon, Memories in the Making: [Memories in the Making \(MIM\)](#).

Horticultural Therapy: Horticulture therapy can improve the quality of life for older adults and involves engagement with plants and gardening as therapeutic and rehabilitation activities. It can be used among older adults with dementia in residential settings to promote *visual, olfactory, and tactile stimulation*, in addition to the *relaxation and restorative effects of connecting with nature*.

Benefits: Both indoor and outdoor horticulture activities have been reported to reduce pain, improve focus and attention, reduce stress, and reduce falls. Horticulture activity also promotes exercise and socialization. The sensory stimulation may provide a distraction to reduce pain perception⁷.

Programs: [Residential and Community-Based Horticulture Programs offered through Eldergrow](#)

Physical Activity: Physical activity is *bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure and may include aerobic, resistance, or combination activities*. There are many ways older adults



can engage in physical activity, depending on current physical functioning, including guided walking, stretching, sound posture, and body awareness.

Benefits: From a purely physical standpoint, these activities influence the structure of the body to improve mobility and function, reduce pain and depression, and slow the physiological effects of aging. Engaging in mild exercise in a socially supportive environment provides both encouragement for the exercise as well as the emotional enjoyment of connecting with others in a group setting¹.

Program: The Otago Exercise Program ([Otago Exercise Program : Falls Prevention for Older Adults : State of Oregon](#)) is an individually tailored, home-based, balance and strength fall prevention program being offered by physical therapists throughout Oregon. An added benefit is that these services may be covered by Medicare.

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) and Movement Therapy (MT): DMT and MT both involve the psychotherapeutic *use of expressive movement to produce physical and emotional change*, based on the interconnection of body and mind. There is a focus on movement, balance, and posture, which have been shown to have a close relationship with function in aging¹. DMT additionally applies the use of dance as a healing art. These interventions often include small group sessions to establish peer support and healthy responses to psychological distress.

Benefits: DMT/MT have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing depression and anxiety, improving self-esteem⁸, increasing quality of life and life satisfaction⁹, and improving interpersonal and cognitive skills¹⁰.

Programs: [Dance for Connection provides information about specific dance programs and training certification](#). The American Dance Therapy Association has a [list of certified providers](#) who work with older adults.

Tai Chi: Many Mind-Body practices have developed as part of varied Eastern cultures and philosophies, including tai chi, yoga, qi gong, and meditation. These practices focus on *a mindful awareness of the body, breathing, connection with the earth, and movement*. Tai chi includes a range of practice, from more vigorous, to greater slowness and stillness, which can lend itself especially well to movement for older adults.

Benefits: In addition to the benefits of physical exercise, including social connectedness when engaged in with others, these mind-body practices have also shown effectiveness in improving cognitive function, reducing stress and anxiety, improving cardiorespiratory function and aerobic capacity, reducing blood pressure, increasing lower extremity strength, stability of gait, and reduced risk for falls¹¹.



Programs: The State of Oregon offers information and a search tool for Tai Chi classes throughout Oregon and SW Washington: [Oregon Health Authority : Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance : Falls Prevention for Older Adults](#)

Music Therapy: Music Therapy is an evidence-based modality which utilizes elements of *music improvisation, receptive music listening, song writing, lyric discussion, music and imagery, music performance, and learning through music*¹² to help people develop skills, adapt behavior, and overcome obstacles in life. Music therapy can be facilitated with individuals or with groups, and for older adults, has been shown to be especially effective in addressing issues such as addictions, trauma, and bereavement¹³.

Benefits: Additional findings of the benefits of music therapy include reducing the cognitive decline of dementia¹⁴; improved social interaction, functioning, and verbal communication in those with Alzheimer’s disease; and reduced anxiety, depression, and pain, including in those with terminal illness and with serious mental illness¹⁵.

Programs: The state of Oregon requires a license to practice music therapy. The Oregon Association of Music Therapy maintains a registry of board-certified and licensed music therapists: [Find a Therapist — The Oregon Association for Music Therapy](#).

Circle of friends: Saint Louis University’s Circle of Friends is an evidence-based group rehabilitation model for older adults who are experiencing loneliness. Groups of eight older adults meet once a week for three months to reduce loneliness by *forming new friendships, engage in meaningful activities with other group participants, and be involved in planning group sessions*. Facilitator training is available online for aging and behavioral health providers.

Benefits: Study findings show that Circle of Friends has led to decreased health care costs and hospitalizations, improved cognition, reduced loneliness, and increased feelings of being needed and psychological well-being.

Program: Find more information about [Circle of Friends](#) and facilitator training materials on Saint Louis University’s website.



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