



EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR DEMENTIA PREVENTION

Do future rehabilitation and fitness professionals understand what motivates older adults to exercise?

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BACKGROUND

- Up to 45% of dementia risk may be modifiable, with physical inactivity among the 14 risk factors outlined in the 2024 Lancet Commission [1].
- Despite its benefits, staying physically active remains a challenge for older adults [2]. *Are we training the next generation to understand what actually motivates older adults to exercise?*
- Study objective:** To determine whether future rehabilitation and fitness professionals understand what matters to older adults regarding exercise by comparing their knowledge of aging, attitudes, perceived exercise benefits and barriers, and self-efficacy.

METHODS

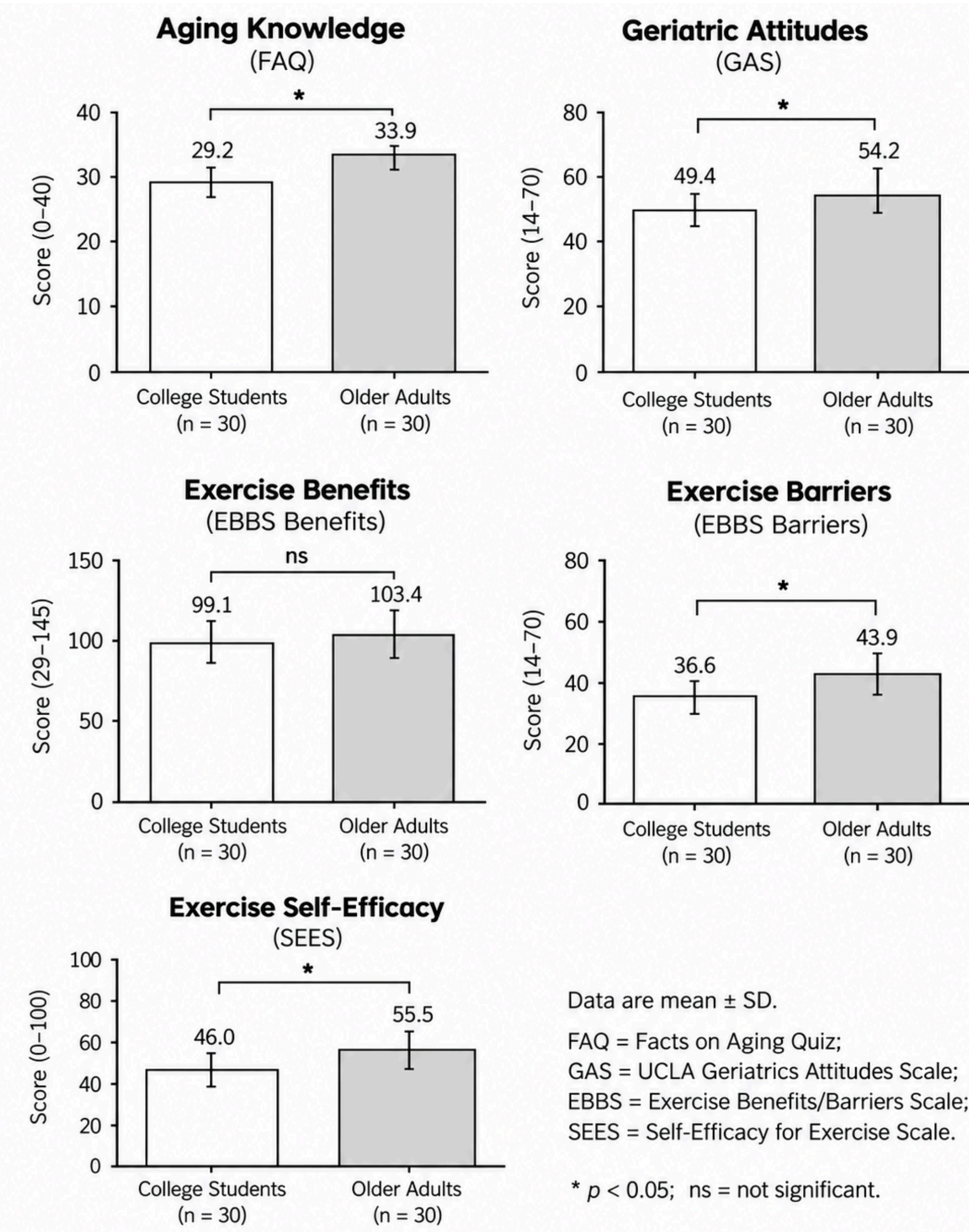
- Study design:** Cross-sectional survey
- Participants (N=60)**
 - 30 community-dwelling older adults (aged 65+)
 - 30 students in Occupational Therapist Assistant/Physiotherapist Assistant (OTA/PTA) or Fitness and Health Promotion programs
- Recruitment:** Convenience sampling from college and community settings via flyers and word of mouth
- Outcome Measures:**
 - Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ)
 - UCLA Geriatrics Attitudes Scale (GAS)
 - Exercise Benefits/Barriers Scale (EBBS)
 - Self-Efficacy for Exercise Scale (SEES)
 - Study-developed preparedness items
- Analysis:** Independent t-tests, Cohen's d, and Pearson correlations; $p < 0.05$

Table 1. Participant demographics

Characteristic	College Students (n = 30)	Older Adults (n = 30)
Age, years, mean ± SD	22.9 ± 6.9	72.0 ± 5.7
Women, n (%)	25 (83.3)	22 (73.3)
Program of study, n (%)	23 (76.7) OTA/PTA 7 (23.3) Fitness & Health Promotion	—
Previous clinical placement with older adults, n (%)	22 (73.3)	—

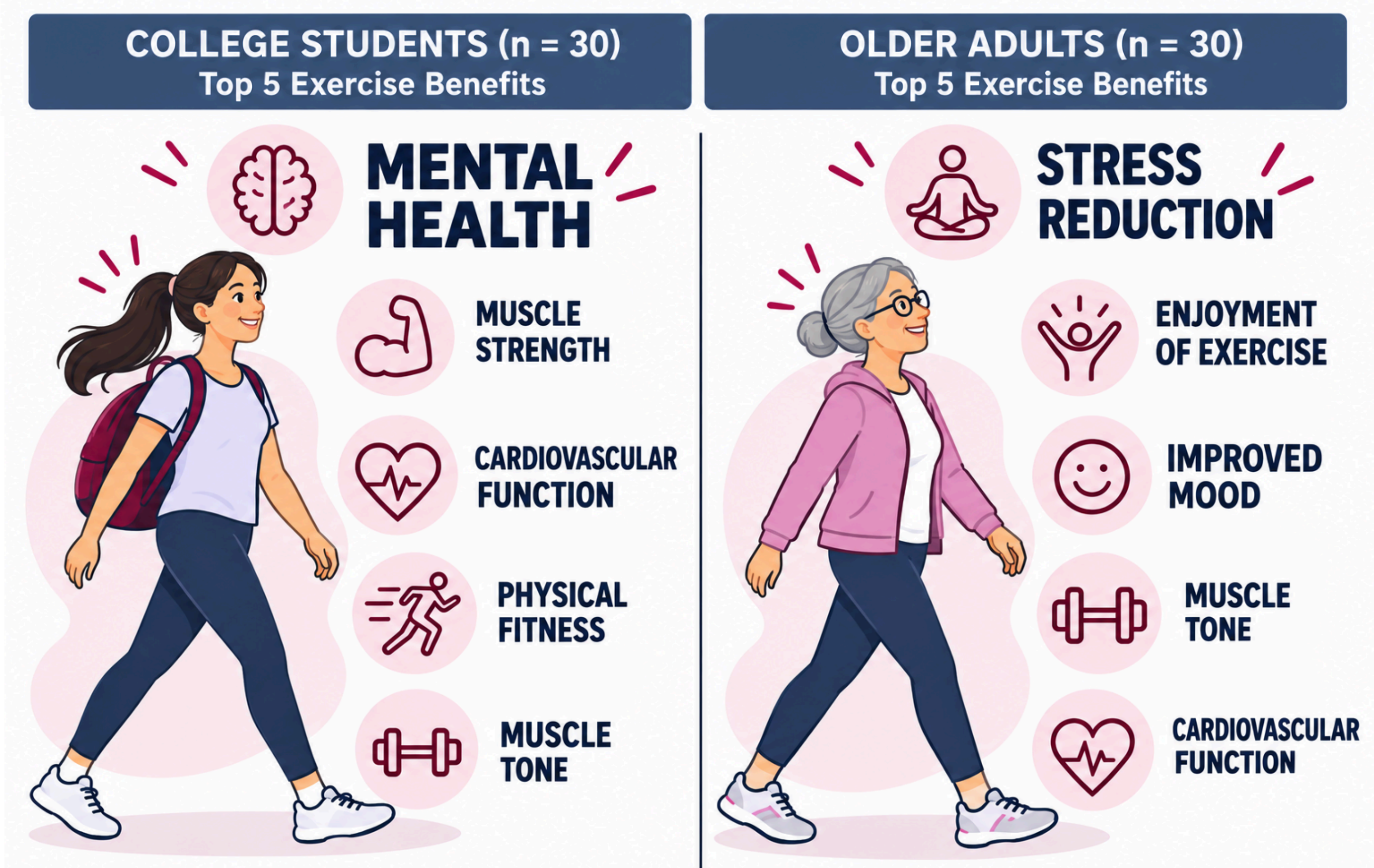
OTA/PTA = Occupational Therapist Assistant/Physiotherapist Assistant. Data are mean ± SD or n (%).

Table 2. Key outcomes by group



RESULTS

Figure 3. Top 5 perceived exercise benefits among participants



Students emphasized fitness and strength, whereas older adults prioritized stress reduction, enjoyment, and improved mood.

DISCUSSION

- Students and older adults recognized the benefits of exercise, but they valued different things: students emphasized mental health and strength, while older adults emphasized stress reduction and enjoyment.
- Preparing future rehabilitation and fitness professionals to understand what motivates older adults may strengthen person-centred exercise counselling and support long-term physical activity for brain health and dementia prevention.
- Exercise for dementia prevention is not only about knowing what works - it is about using language that resonates with clients (e.g., older adults) and motivates them to stay active.**