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Understanding How the COVID-19 Pandemic Influenced Older Adults' Grocery Shopping Habits

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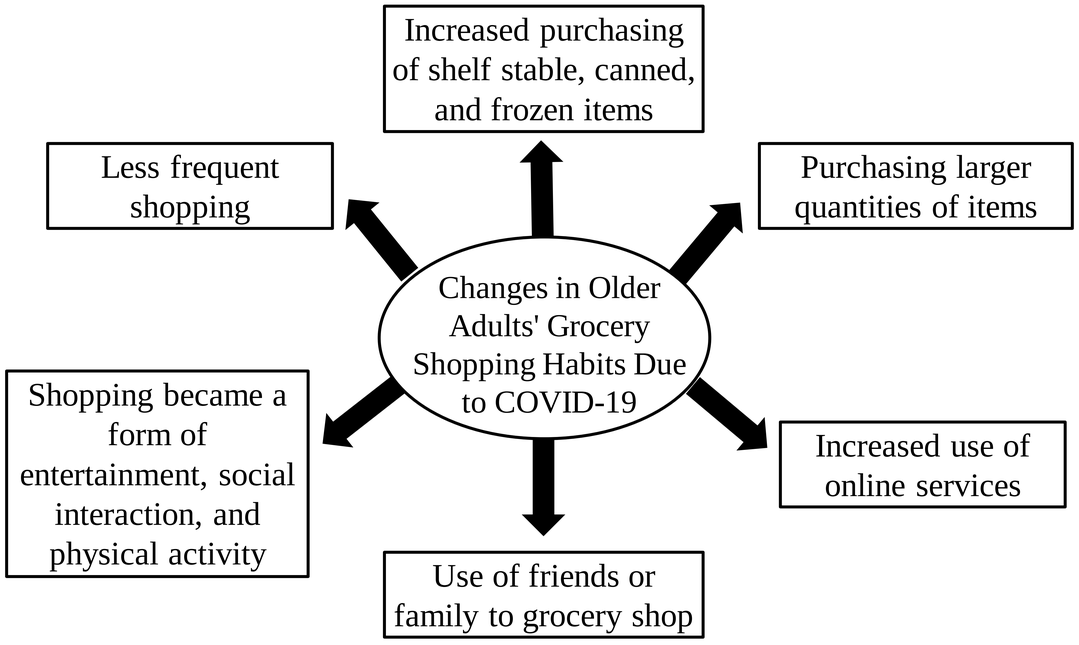
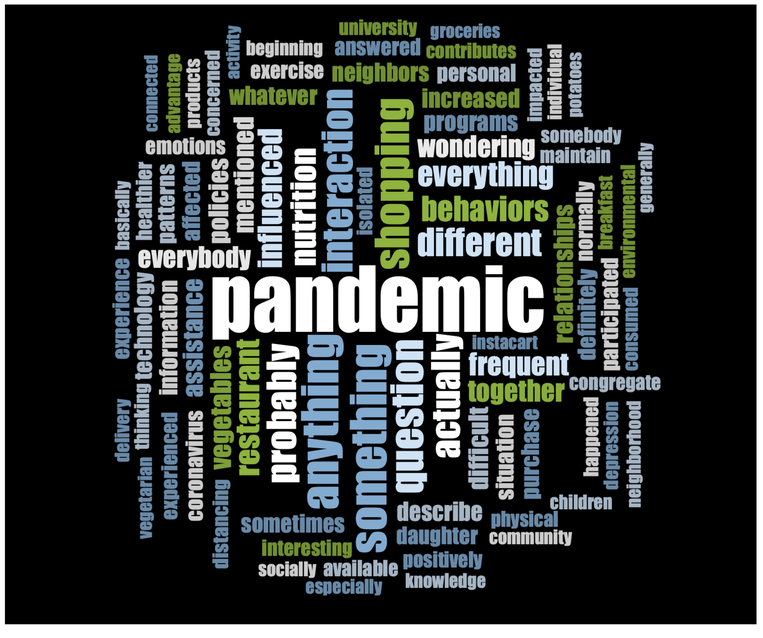
Background

- The ability to grocery shop is an important aspect of maintaining adequate nutritional status among older adults.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, many older adults changed their typical grocery shopping habits in an attempt to remain safe.
- Thus, the current study aimed to investigate these changes to provide insight for future nutritional support for older adults.

Objective

- The study objective was to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced older adults' grocery shopping habits.





Methods

- In this qualitative study, a total of 23 older adults aged 60 years or older participated in individual interviews via Zoom.
- Data were analyzed using deductive content analysis.

Results

- Attempting to be cautious and avoid contact with the virus, most participants reported altering grocery shopping habits by shopping less frequently, using online services such as grocery pickup or delivery, or having friends or family members do the shopping.
- However, some participants continued shopping in stores due to poor quality produce items picked out by shoppers and safe policies implemented by stores.
- Also, grocery shopping in stores became incentivized as some participants viewed it as a form of entertainment, social interaction, and even physical activity during the pandemic.
- Although many stores offered senior shopping hours, the majority of study participants reported not using these services due to inconvenient times.
- Purchasing larger quantities of items and selecting more shelf stable, canned, and frozen items were also reported.

Conclusions/Implications

- Providing older adults with training and education on using online grocery shopping services may help this population have safe and simple access to healthy food items.
- Training grocery store workers to pick out good quality produce may encourage more older adults to use these online services.
- Modifications to grocery store-instated senior hours should consider more convenient times to best support older adults.
- Because the grocery store emerged as an enjoyable place, it is especially crucial that grocery stores continue to enforce the policies that allow older adults to feel safe purchasing their groceries.