

Crochet Therapy

Michelle Borst Polino

*American Counseling Association
michelle_borst@sbcglobal.net*

Purpose:

Working with elderly struggling with onset Dementia issues and to improve memory and give purpose today.

Working with disabled to give sense of purpose, become productive and give back to the community by donating various projects to hospitals, foster homes, and shelters.

Two that I have worked with had very low reading/comprehension levels, and working with basic crochet patterns, there has been a marked improvement in these skills.

Materials Needed:

Yarn, pattern, various crochet hooks

Procedures:

I have been utilizing this intervention in group based practice, similar to a coffee clutch or book club, where individuals can participate to create various projects for organizations and discuss issues in their life (usually related to their disability/age) in a less threatening, friendly atmosphere of friends.

In this manner, they also are given a little more control as they select which projects they would like to work on for different organizations, ie chemo caps for Cancer patients, loveys for preemies at hospital, loveys for child victims of fire who lose all their toys or sexually abused children which gives them a super-hero lovey to take to court or carry when they speak with police, etc.

We start with basic crochet techniques, basic stitches and move them to a simple granny square, the initial shape for loveys or blankets. Other members have moved forward to creat hats to go with loveys.

Process Questions and Follow-Up:

This is an on-going group with no closure as the elderly and disabled have issues they are dealing with for the remainder of their lives.

This informal group also allows for friendship bonds outside of the "group" which helps keep them socially connected as opposed to isolated due their illnesses/age which helps combat feelings of depression, uselessness and loneliness.

Theoretical Rationale and/or Research Base:

<http://blog.lionbrand.com/2014/05/20/10-most-important-health-benefits-of-yarncrafting/>

1. Knitting and Crochet Relieve Depression

Depression relief is by far the most reported and studied benefit of crochet and knitting. The repetition of the crafts has been shown to release serotonin, a natural anti-depressant. CNN recently reported that “in one study of more than 3,500 knitters, published in *The British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 81% of respondents with depression reported feeling happy after knitting. More than half reported feeling “very happy.”

2. Crafting Reduces Anxiety

Yarncrafts helps with various forms of anxiety. It keeps your hands busy and mind focused so that you can attend classes or events even when you have social anxiety. It brings the internal mind to a calmer space for when you’re coping with the anxiety of repetitious thoughts. The counting has even been shown to serve as a productive outlet for people with anxiety associated with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder as well as eating disorders. The Craft Yarn Council reports on one study that showed nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of women with anorexia found knitting to be calming and anxiety-reducing.

3. Projects Build Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem has a variety of negative health impacts. Crafting helps build self-esteem by:

- Building new skills
- Allowing the crafter to feel productive
- Providing a useful way to give to others
- Creating beauty through self-expression

Simply visualizing, working on and then creating a product can make you feel better about yourself. This has helped people with everything from coping with the fear of unemployment to gaining the strength to leave abusive relationships.

4. Crafting May Reduce or Postpone Dementia

Several studies have shown that knitting and crochet can postpone age-related memory loss. The crafts can also be soothing for those people who are already experiencing signs of dementia. Recently, researcher Yonas Geda, MD, a neuropsychiatrist at the Mayo Clinic, completed a study that showed knitting is neuroprotective and may reduce dementia by as much as 50%.

5. Knit or Crochet Through Insomnia

Insomnia is a terrible feeling. You are tired but you can’t sleep so then you’re frustrated that you can’t sleep, which just makes it harder to sleep. Yarncrafts to the rescue! Focus on a soft, soothing, easy, repetitive crochet or knit project and your body and mind can often wind down enough to get to bed. Stitchlinks, a UK organization that does research into the benefits of knitting, reports that a study by professor Herbert Benson of the Mind/Body Medical Institute found that 100% of insomnia patients reported improved sleep with 90% being able to eliminate medication in a program that included knitting.

6. Relaxation Reduces Irritability and Restlessness

We recently shared how you can craft your way through cabin fever. Crochet and knitting can help you through any times when you feel grumpy, restless, frustrated or bored. This positive outlet preserves your relationships and keeps your mood balanced.

7. Crafting as Prayer

Prayer has been proven to have a diverse array of health benefits. Crochet and knitting can be used as part of your prayer process. See our articles on Prayer Shawl Crafting and How to Create a Sacred Space for Crafting.

8. Yarncrafting Builds Community

No matter what health issue you are dealing with, it helps to have a community of support around you. There are so many ways that crochet and knitting provide community:

- Through local knit-ins and crochet-in-public meetups
- At fiber fairs and related events
- Informally through connections at yarn stores
- In the many online craft communities
- Through a sense of being tied to the generations before and after us

Check out our ideas for crafting with family and friends.

9. Crafting Helps with Grief Processing

Loss is a horrible thing and none of us escape it. During periods of deep grief it can seem impossible that you'll ever be able to function again. You get in your pajamas and stay in your bed and feel like the world has come to an end. Crochet and knitting can be one of the most comforting things during this time. It's something that you can do without a lot of money or effort. It's something you can do in small bits, when you have the energy. It can, for a moment, take your mind off of your pain. The textures and colors of the yarn, the warmth of the item that you're creating and the beautiful up/down motion of stitch upon stitch can get you one day closer to feeling okay again.

10. Stress-Busting Benefits of Yarncrafting

Stress is one of our leading health problems. Its effects range from migraines and fatigue to heart failure and early memory loss. Reducing stress reduces disease. Using knitting or crochet as meditation can be a daily way to minimize the effects of stress in your life.

What's the number one way that knitting or crochet heals you?

Yonas Geda, associate professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at the Mayo Clinic in Arizona, published a study in the Spring 2011 edition of *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry & Clinical Neurosciences* that validated crafters of all stripes. His research showed that people who engaged their minds by reading books, playing games or crafting had a decreased risk of mild cognitive impairment, a possible precursor to Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of dementia.

“The study suggests that engaging in certain types of mentally stimulating acts,” Geda says, “is associated with decreased risk of cognitive impairment.”

Their study looked at 1,321 adults, ages 70 to 89, 197 of whom had been identified as already having mild cognitive impairment. Both the normal and cognitively impaired groups were surveyed about their activities within the last year.

The study demonstrated that using the brain might prevent losing it. The data showed that computer use, playing games, crafting, reading books and watching less TV resulted in a striking 30 to 50 percent decrease in the odds of having mild cognitive impairment.

Though the study didn’t examine exactly how these activities might protect the brain, it did reference other works suggesting that mentally active people overall might live healthier lifestyles, maybe exercising and eating better, or that cognitive activity might promote the development of new neuro pathways—or cognitive reserves. In other words, staying mentally active through knitting and reading, etc. makes “deposits” to an individual’s brain “bank”; this can possibly buffer against Alzheimer’s Disease and other forms of dementia.

Limitations:

Physical impairment which does not allow the patient to hold knitting needles/crochet hook, such as rheumatoid arthritis or paralysis, although there are some crochet hooks that are ergonomically designed for those with some forms of arthritis.

Practice Settings:

- College Counseling
- Counselor Education and Supervision
- Mental Health Agency/Private Practice Counseling
- Rehabilitation Counseling
- School Counseling