

# Does a Confident Dementia Care Educational Intervention Reduce Caregivers' Stress?



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## Background

- Caregivers experience heightened stress levels that can impact their mental and physical well-being, as well as the quality of care they provide (Jorge et al., 2021)
- Most available resources for caregivers do not focus on the best way for caregivers to learn about and retain important dementia-related information
- Retrieval practice during learning enhances memory (Agarwal et al., 2011)
  - Receiving detailed, corrective feedback during retrieval practice further enhances memory and reduces memory errors (Sitzman et al., 2022)
- Little is known about how structured retrieval practice—spaced practice tests during learning with detailed, corrective feedback—impacts caregivers' stress

## Our Goal

Determine the degree to which caregivers' stress is reduced by a structured retrieval practice (SRP) intervention

## Participants

N = 21 Caregivers from the Virginia Beach community

- Inclusion criteria:
  - 50+ years old
  - Have moderate perceived stress scores
  - Pass the Ascertain Dementia 8 (Galvin et al., 2005)
  - Pass 2 screening checks (online + video)

## Design

- Learning strategy (between-participants):
  - Reading
  - Structured Retrieval Practice (SRP)

## Materials

- 8 Categories: 4 managing stress & coping, 4 ADRD symptoms

- Reading:** Information about symptoms in a webpage format
- Retrieval Practice & Final Tests:** 64 questions (8 per category)
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS):** 14 questions about stress
- All participants studied 4 categories on stress and coping; Participants got to choose which 4 out of 12 ADRD symptoms they wanted to study
- Parts 1 and 2 occurred in Session 1; Part 3 occurred in Sessions 2, 3, and 4

## Perceived Stress Scale

### Scale

- 0: never
- 1: almost never
- 2: sometimes
- 3: fairly often
- 4: very often

\* Indicates a reverse-scored item

- In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?
- \* In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?
- \* In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
- \* In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- \* In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- \* In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- \* In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
- \* In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?
- In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Cohen et al. (1983)

## Reading

**Spotting the Warning Signs of Stress**

**What Is Stress?**  
Caring for someone with dementia is hard work. It can cause a lot of stress on your body and mind. This stress is normal, but it can hurt your health if you don't deal with it. You should watch for warning signs of stress.

People have different ways of showing and handling stress. Some cultures expect people to be strong and not show stress. Others encourage talking about difficulties. No matter what your cultural background teaches, it is important to recognize stress signs and get help when you need it.



**The 10 Warning Signs to Watch For**

- Denial** You might tell yourself, "Mom is going to get better" or "This isn't really happening." It's hard to accept that dementia doesn't go away.
- Anger and Frustration** You may get mad at the person you're caring for. You might think, "He knows how to get dressed. He's just being stubborn!" Remember, they're not doing it on purpose.

**Euphoria and Dementia**

Sometimes, a person with dementia may feel very happy or have lots of energy. This is called euphoria. They might feel overly excited or have a high mood. This can happen in people with a type of dementia called frontotemporal dementia.



**What Causes Euphoria?**

There are many reasons why someone with dementia might feel euphoric. Some of these are:

- Frontotemporal dementia
- A family history of similar issues
- Changes in the brain's chemistry
- Side effects from antidepressants, street drugs, or alcohol
- Loneliness, abuse, or problems with money or housing

**What Triggers Euphoria?**

Euphoria can happen after certain events or situations. These triggers include:

- Being in a loud, busy, or exciting environment (like large crowds or bright lights)

## Structured Retrieval Practice (SRP)

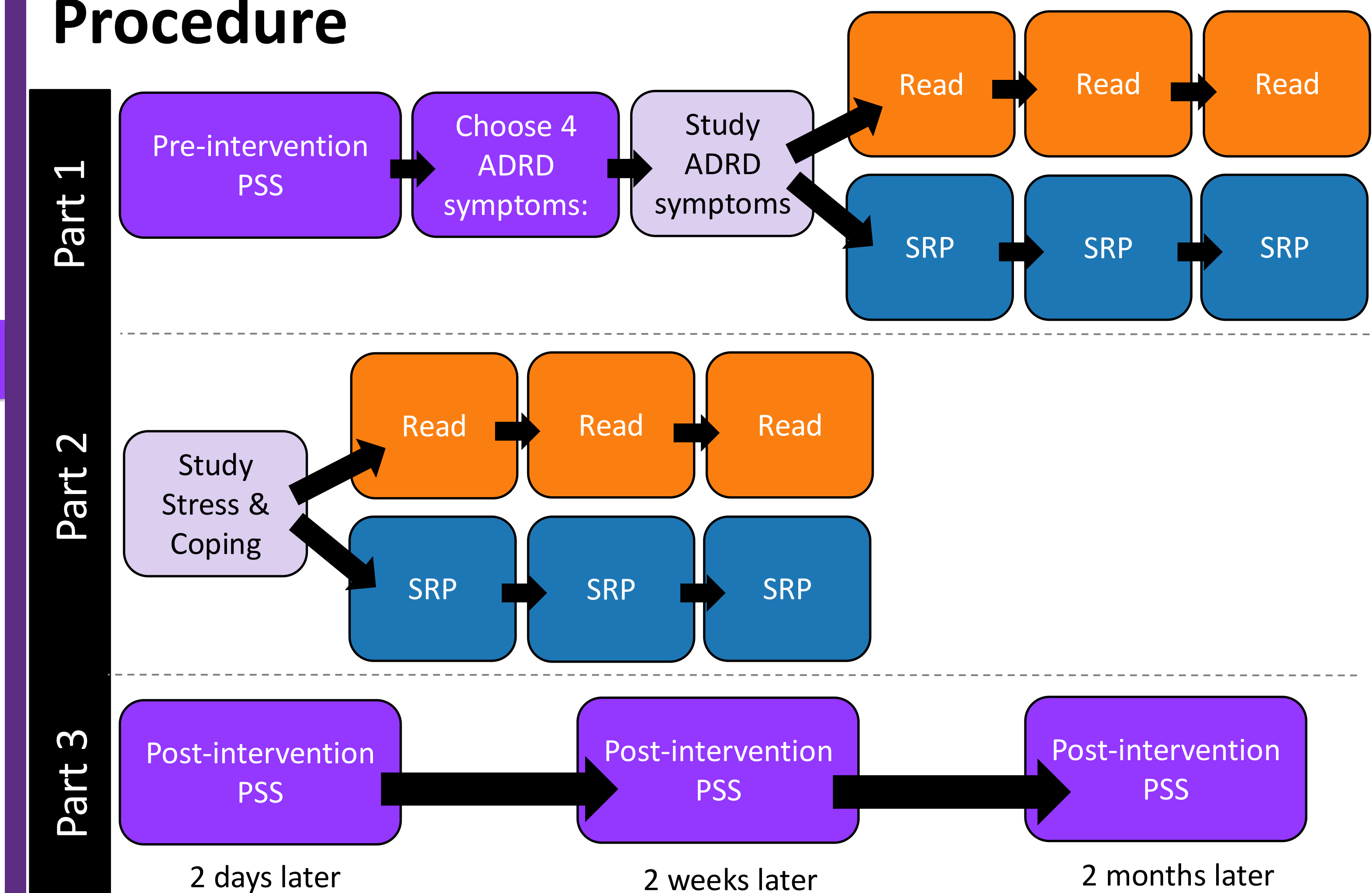


What is euphoria that your loved one might experience?

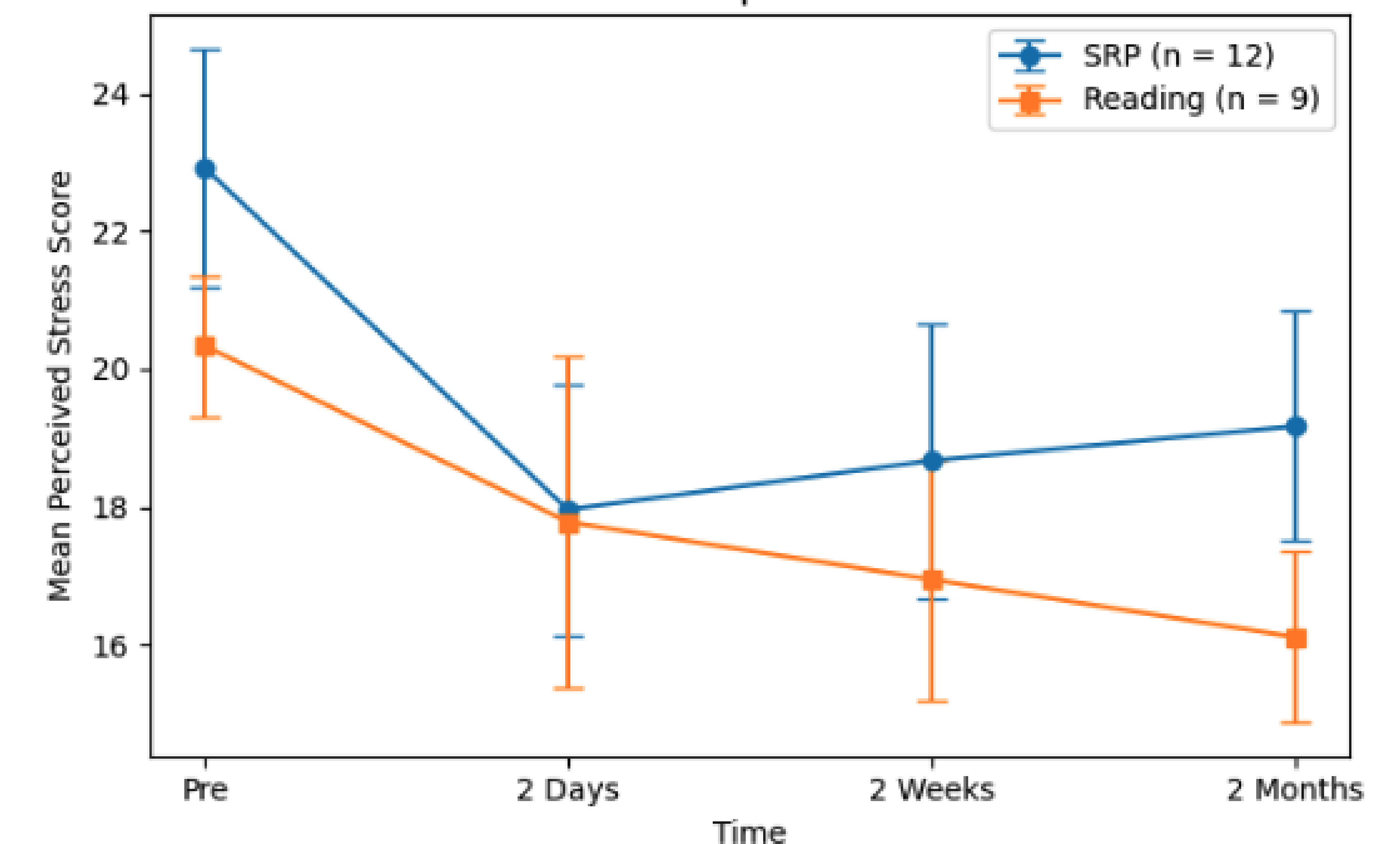
- Feeling like they acquired supernatural powers
- Feeling like they are in an alternate reality
- Accepting their condition
- A feeling of intense happiness

No, that is incorrect. Accepting their condition is not an example of euphoria. Euphoria is intense joy and extremely high self-esteem. Euphoria in people living with dementia is rare.

## Procedure



## Results



## Conclusions & Future Directions

- Preliminary data shows no difference in stress scores between the reading and SRP groups
- Post-intervention stress scores were significantly lower than pre-intervention stress scores in both groups
- Data collection is ongoing
- Future work will examine other measures of stress