

Support to Promote Exercise in Women with Breast Cancer

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Purpose: Using self-efficacy theory, the purpose of this pilot study was to explore social support needed to promote exercise adherence among older women with breast cancer receiving chemotherapy (WBCC).

Specific Aims: 1. Determine the feasibility of a home-based exercise protocol in WBCC; 2. Determine the social support network and functions of WBCC; 3. Explore the differences in social support networks and functions and fatigue between women who adhere to exercise and those who do not.

Methods: This study used a one-group baseline/posttest design. A sample size of 10 participants was recruited from a medical oncology clinic of a southeastern university medical center and from private medical oncologists' offices. Inclusion criteria were at least 50 years of age, able to speak and understand English, Stage I to III or recurrent breast cancer without metastasis and beginning outpatient chemotherapy. Exclusion criteria were diagnosis of mental disorder (i.e. diagnosed schizophrenia, bipolar, or clinical depression), participation in regular moderate or strenuous exercise a minimum of 20 minutes, four times per week, and any major health problems or co-morbid conditions that prevented walking. At the participant's home, two to seven days after recruitment and first chemotherapy treatment, the researcher taught use of the pedometer and taking pre and post activity pulses, assessed participant's ability to walk by measuring initial time and distance walked while walking with the participant, and mutually set exercise goals with the participant. Participants were instructed to walk to meet her own weekly goals and to keep a log of pre and post activity pulses, walking time and distance, fatigue, cancer and treatment-related symptoms, and support sources. Weekly telephone interviews obtained exercise data, answered questions, and assessed any problems with the protocol. Posttest measures at the third chemotherapy treatment included exercise activities, social support, fatigue, self-efficacy and an open-ended questionnaire.

Discussion: Preliminary data suggests a home-based walking exercise program is a cost effective, feasible way for WBCC to reduce fatigue. Women older than 70 years of age receiving chemotherapy participate in a walking exercise program less. Most cite a lack of interest in the intervention. For those women who do participate, nausea in the first two to three days post chemotherapy, increasing fatigue, environmental factors, and ongoing life events interrupt regular exercise. The support and encouragement of close family members and friends, especially those who exercise with the WBCC, enhanced exercise participation.