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Evidence-Based Practice for Fatigue Management in Adults With Cancer: Exercise as an Intervention

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Purpose/Objectives: To review and summarize the current state of the evidence for exercise as an intervention for cancer-related fatigue and to facilitate application to clinical practice.

Data Sources: Articles, abstracts, and practice guidelines published through October 2003.

Data Synthesis: The strength of the evidence of effectiveness of exercise in managing cancer-related fatigue is growing.

Conclusions: All patients with cancer should be encouraged to maintain an optimum level of physical activity during and following cancer treatment. Patients with breast cancer and other selected patients should receive recommendations for moderate exercise programs. Referrals to physical therapy and/or rehabilitation may benefit certain patients, including those with comorbidities or deconditioning. Published multidisciplinary evidence-based guidelines for exercise programs involving patients with cancer are needed.

Implications for Nursing: Nurses may participate in implementing exercise interventions with patients with cancer in various roles depending on skill and knowledge—from encouraging physical activity to referring patients to physical therapy and/or rehabilitation programs to prescribing and monitoring exercise in certain patient populations.

Cancer-related fatigue (CRF) is the most common and distressing side effect of cancer treatment. This fatigue has a profound effect on patients' ability to perform activities of daily living. As the evidence for exercise in the prevention and management of CRF has grown since the 1990s, oncology nurses and healthcare professionals are challenged to integrate exercise interventions for patients with cancer. Effective management of CRF through strategies such as exercise can affect the multidimensional experience of fatigue and improve patients' functional status and quality of life (QOL). This article is a review and summary of the current state of the evidence on exercise as an intervention for CRF. This clinically relevant synthesis facilitates application to nursing practice and identifies directions for future research needed to address gaps in current knowledge.

Definitions

CRF is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by physical, psychological, and other diverse factors. CRF is defined by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) as "a persistent, subjective sense of tiredness related to cancer or cancer treatment that interferes with usual functioning" (Mock

Key Points . . .

- Exercise has been shown to be the most effective nonpharmacologic intervention for cancer-related fatigue (CRF).
- Home-based aerobic exercise programs, including walking, are feasible and effective for CRF in diverse patients with cancer undergoing treatment.
- Oncology nurses have a responsibility to apply the knowledge of exercise for CRF to practice through education, limited exercise prescription, and referral.

Goal for CE Enrollees:

To enhance nurses' knowledge about current evidence related to exercise as an intervention for cancer-related fatigue.

Objectives for CE Enrollees:

On completion of this CE, the participant will be able to

1. Describe the theoretical basis for the use of exercise in the management of fatigue in people with cancer.
2. Outline the evidence currently available related to the use of exercise in the management of cancer-related fatigue.
3. Discuss the clinical and research implications of exercise in the management of fatigue in people with cancer.



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