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Strong Against Fatigue: How Resistance Training Influences Quality of Life in Breast Cancer Patients

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Background

Up to 95% of women undergoing adjuvant therapy for breast cancer experience cancer-related fatigue (CRF), which may persist beyond treatment and substantially impair quality of life. CRF is characterized by persistent fatigue that is disproportionate to activity level and not relieved by rest. Resistance training has shown beneficial effects on CRF; however, adherence during active treatment is influenced by multiple facilitating and inhibiting factors.

Objective

This study aimed to explore breast cancer patients' subjective perceptions of the effects of resistance training on CRF and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) during adjuvant therapy, and to identify perceived support factors, barriers, and preferences regarding resistance training recommendations.

Methods

An exploratory qualitative study design was employed. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with six women undergoing adjuvant therapy for breast cancer participating in resistance training programs. Participants were recruited via advertisement in a medical training center. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz and Rädiker (2024). A combined deductive–inductive category system was developed, supported by MAXQDA software.

Results

Participants reported either an absence ($n = 2$) or a reduction ($n = 4$) of fatigue symptoms, alongside improvements in HRQoL. Enhanced physical performance was associated with increased participation in daily and social activities. Key facilitators of training adherence included social interaction, perceived performance gains, reduction of treatment-related side effects, and professional support. Major barriers comprised motivational difficulties, pain, wound healing complications, emotional stressors, and structural or organizational constraints. Training recommendations varied considerably, with a predominantly emphasized reactive symptom management rather than preventive exercise strategies.

Conclusion

Resistance training during adjuvant therapy appears to have a positive subjective impact on CRF and HRQoL in women with breast cancer. Identified barriers and gaps in care highlight the need for improved implementation strategies and preventive, patient-centered exercise recommendations in oncology practice.

Keywords

cancer related fatigue, resistance training, facilitators, barriers,

Conflict of Interest & Ethical Approval

yes

Abstract submitters declaration

yes

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