Providing care for patients with cancer places caregivers at risk for experiencing elevated levels of stress. Caregivers of patients with brain tumors may be at increased risk because of the multifaceted needs of this patient population. As such, the authors sought to determine caregiver preferences toward various types of stress-reduction programs for a population of stressed caregivers. This information provides valuable insight for researchers designing studies to address the experiences of stressed caregivers.

At a Glance

✦ In the study, most participants reported experiencing elevated levels of stress because of caregiver responsibilities.
✦ Overall, caregivers were most interested in programs such as exercise, massage, and coping skills training to reduce stress.
✦ Reducing stress associated with caregiving stands to improve the physical health and emotional well-being of caregivers.

Stress and Caregiving

Looking at the factors associated with stress in the cancer caregiver population is not a new field of research. Studies have documented that age, educational level, and ability to participate in valued activities play a role in caregivers’ levels of emotional stress (Burns, Tanner, Preece, & Cameron, 1981; Goldstein et al., 2004; Sansoni, Vellone, & Piras, 2004). In addition, caring for patients with dementia and problems with cognition also has been reported to increase stress (Covinsky et al., 2003).

The stress associated with caregiving has been shown to negatively affect caregiver health. Previous studies have indicated that being a caregiver is linked to negative psychological and physiologic health consequences. Psychological disorders reported include panic disorder, major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder (Sansoni et al., 2004; Vanderwerker, Laff, Kadan-Lottick, McColl, & Prigerson, 2005; Winslow, 2003). Physiologically, caregivers have been reported to experience high incidences of respiratory infections, hypertension, eating disorders, and poor health habits, as well as reduction in immune function (Baron, Cutrona, Hicklin, Russell, & Lubaroff, 1990; Carter & Chang, 2000; Chentsova-Dutton et al., 2000; Mittelman, Roth, Haley, & Zarin, 2004).

Brain tumors, regardless of grade, can be responsible for physical and psychological changes in patients. The changes result from the disease and treatment and depend on the...