Exercise Among Women With Ovarian Cancer: A Feasibility and Pre-/Post-Test Exploratory Pilot Study

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Purpose/Objectives: To establish the feasibility and acceptability of completing a higher dose of the planned physical activity volume among women with ovarian cancer, including those undergoing active treatment.

Design: A pre-/post-test exercise intervention. All participants were asked to complete 225 minutes per week of physical activity for 26 weeks. Multiple supports were provided, including exercise DVDs, self-reported logs, and an objective physical activity tracker (Fitbit®).

Setting: Home-based exercise intervention with in-person training and telephone follow-ups.

Sample: 10 women with ovarian cancer who were treated within Penn Medicine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Methods: Home-based, in-person exercise counseling was provided by an exercise trainer weekly for the first six weeks and then monthly for a total of 26 weeks. Weekly follow-up telephone calls were used to assess exercise adherence and barriers to completing exercise, review symptom changes, and provide behavioral support.

Main Research Variables: Feasibility and acceptability.

Findings: Eight participants completed the study and achieved at least 80% of the prescribed exercise dose. Five participants were undergoing chemotherapy simultaneously. Participants experienced no adverse events during the 26-week intervention. Compared to baseline, average steps increased by 1,593 per day and moderate-intensity physical activity increased by 15 minutes per day.

Conclusions: A 225-minutes-per-week exercise program is feasible and acceptable in a population of patients with ovarian cancer. Participants significantly improved their physical activity during the 26-week intervention.

Implications for Nursing: The findings suggest that nursing professionals could recommend that women with ovarian cancer exercise 225 minutes per week regardless of cancer and/or treatment trajectory. For those experiencing aches and pains, behavioral supports and suggestions of a lower exercise dose are needed to maintain physical activity.