

Factors That Influence Health-Promoting Behaviors in Cancer Caregivers

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OBJECTIVES: To describe cancer caregivers' participation in health-promoting behaviors and to identify factors influencing participation.

SAMPLE & SETTING: 129 informal cancer caregivers at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center.

METHODS & VARIABLES: Cross-sectional survey methodology using Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile-II (HPLP-II), PROMIS® Global Physical Health, NIH Toolbox Stress and Self-Efficacy, Caregiver Reaction Assessment, and Family Care Inventory Mutuality subscale.

RESULTS: Caregivers reported the highest HPLP-II subscale scores for spirituality and interpersonal relationships and the lowest for physical activity. Caregivers who were older, with lower body mass indices, in better physical health, and with higher self-efficacy and mutuality participated in more health-promoting behaviors. Sixty percent of the caregivers reported that they exercised less since becoming a caregiver, and 47% reported that their diet was worse.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Future research is needed to examine novel interventions to increase health-promoting activities in cancer caregivers, and these interventions might be strengthened by including components that focus on increasing self-efficacy and/or improving the strength of the relationship between the caregiver and care recipient.

KEYWORDS caregiver; cancer; health behaviors; health-promoting behaviors; exercise; nutrition
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Being an informal caregiver (i.e., providing unpaid care for a sick or disabled family member or friend) increases one's risk of all-cause mortality, particularly from lifestyle- and stress-related diseases, such as cardiovascular disease (Schulz & Beach, 1999). Although caregiving can be rewarding, providing care for an individual with cancer is stressful and can take a toll on physical and mental health (Adelman et al., 2014; Gibbons et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2019). Indeed, changes in physical health in caregivers appear to be associated with the psychological stress of caregiving rather than the physical demands of caregiving (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2007) or the disease severity of the patient (Kim et al., 2015). Participating in health-promoting behaviors such as exercising, eating a healthy diet, and practicing stress-reduction activities provide protection against lifestyle- and stress-related diseases. However, caregivers tend to prioritize the needs of the care recipient over their own needs, including health-promoting self-care (Gibbons et al., 2014). The objectives of this study were twofold: to describe the health-promoting self-care behaviors practiced by informal caregivers of individuals with cancer, and to identify those factors that influence participation in health-promoting behaviors in caregivers.

Background

Providing care for a family member or friend with cancer can be demanding and may include multiple responsibilities, such as preparing meals, driving to medical appointments, maintaining the home, monitoring symptoms, administering medications and treatments, coordinating medical care, and providing emotional and physical support. Caregiver participation in health-promoting activities is important because healthy, prepared caregivers are in a better position to meet the demands associated with cancer