

The Effects of Exercise on Mental Health of Breast Cancer Patients

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Background: Patients diagnosed with breast cancer may experience many mental health issues that are often not treated appropriately [1, 2]. Breast cancer diagnosis and treatment causes mental problems like stress, anxiety and depression [1-3]. Exercise interventions have a beneficial effect on psychological functions and mental well-being [4-6]. Exercise training is an important part in breast cancer rehabilitation and might improve the mental health status of these patients [7-14].

Purpose: The aim of this literature review is to point out how exercise may affect the mental health of breast cancer patients.

Methods: A literature search was conducted in four databases (PubMed, OVID, Web of Science and Scopus). The search included articles concerning exercise for breast cancer patients with mental health related outcomes. Articles reporting only physical health outcomes were excluded from this review. Two authors searched the literature independently and selected the articles. Any disagreements were resolved by a third researcher.

Results: After the literature search 875 articles were found and 21 of them were included in the review. The included papers indicated that exercise improves quality of life, depression symptoms, cancer-related fatigue, anxiety and mood for breast cancer patients. Most of the studies provided a combined exercise protocol of aerobic and resistance training. The measurement mostly counted was Quality of Life. There was a high heterogeneity of the interventions and the different measurements performed.

Conclusions: The results of this review agree with the results of the latest meta-analyses on the subject. Physical exercise can be beneficial for mental health and should be included in multidisciplinary approaches for breast cancer patients. Future studies should focus on the specific characteristics of exercise (type, intensity) that might be prescribed.

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Keywords: breast cancer; exercise; mental health

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