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Effects of therapeutic massage on the quality of life among patients with breast cancer during treatment

OBJECTIVE: Therapeutic massage has demonstrated positive physical and emotional benefits to offset the effects of treatments associated with breast cancer. The goal of this study was to assess the impact of therapeutic massage on the quality of life of patients undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

DESIGN: Using a pre/post intervention assessment design, this prospective, convenience sample pilot study measured anxiety, pain, nausea, sleep quality, and quality of life. Treatment consisted of one 30-minute treatment per week for 3 consecutive weeks.

OUTCOME MEASURES: Instruments selected for this study were used in previous massage therapy studies to measure quality of life/health status and have documented validity and reliability.

RESULTS: Participants experienced a reduction in several quality of life symptom concerns after only 3 weeks of massage therapy. Respondents' cumulative pre- and post-massage mean for state anxiety, sleep quality, and quality of life/functioning showed significant improvement. Among study participants, there was variability in reported episodes of nausea, vomiting, and retching; although participants reported decreased pain and distress, changes were non-significant.

CONCLUSIONS: Therapeutic massage shows potential benefits for ameliorating the effects of breast cancer treatment by reducing side effects of chemotherapy and radiation and improving perceived quality of life and overall functioning.