

Factors predicting adherence to risk management behaviours of women at increased risk for developing lymphoedema

What was the aim?

Approximately 20-30% of women diagnosed with breast cancer will develop lymphoedema, an abnormal accumulation of lymphatic fluid due to lymphatic system damage following radiation to the axilla and/or surgical removal of lymph nodes. The threat of developing lymphoedema remains a constant threat over the lifetime of these woman.

Utilising the Cognitive-Social Health Information Processing framework, we wanted to understand what is preventing some woman in this cohort, from adhering to risk management strategies that will help minimise the risk of developing lymphoedema.

How did we do it?

We recruited 103 woman who had undergone breast cancer treatment and had lymph-node surgery and asked them to complete measures of lymphoedema-related perceived risk, beliefs and expectancies, distress, self-regulatory ability to manage distress, knowledge and adherence to risk management behaviours. After completing the measures, they received a handbook titled “Lymphedema: What Every Woman Should Know”. They were followed-up at 6 and 12 month intervals and reassessed using the same measures.

What did we find?

The more understanding a woman has about managing her lymphoedema risk, the more likely she is to adhere closely to the risk management strategies. Educating women about lymphoedema risk management also helps to increase a woman’s confidence in being able to follow these recommendations. Over time, distress about lymphoedema risk was found to significantly decrease along with women feeling more able to carry out the risk management strategies. In addition, those women who are able to manage their distress are also more likely to adhere to risk management behaviours.

What does this mean in practice?

As part of routine care, woman at risk of developing lymphoedema should be assessed for their understanding of risk management strategies and their confidence levels in carrying out risk management activities.

Citation

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