Disney Movies May Boost Quality of Life for Women with Cancer

Women with gynecologic cancer who watched these classic films during cancer treatment saw an improvement in their emotional well-being.

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Who doesn't love a classic Disney film? With beloved characters and catchy songs, these stories are sure to put a smile on anyone's face.

What's more, watching these movies can improve the emotional and social well-being of women undergoing chemotherapy for gynecologic cancer, such as cancers of the cervix, ovaries and uterus, as well as reduce their sense of fatigue, according to a new study published in JAMA Network Open, Healio reports.

Researchers at the Medical University of Vienna randomly assigned 25 women over age 18 to watch one of eight Disney movies during each of six chemo cycles at a cancer center in Vienna. The films were German language versions of Cinderella, Lady and the Tramp, The Sword in the Stone, Mary Poppins, The Jungle Book, Aristocats, Rob in Hood and The Little Mermaid. A control group of 25 women didn't watch any movies. The average age of the women was around 60.

Participants answered a quality of life questionnaire that assessed their emotional and social functioning as well as fatigue status before and after their chemo cycles.

After completing all six cycles, compared with women in the control group, women in the Disney cohort reported feeling less tense and worried, less intrusion on their family life and social activities, and fewer fatigue symptoms. In addition, the quality of life among this group significantly improved.

Researchers were also surprised to find that the perception of quality of life among women with cancer in the Disney cohort was even higher than that of healthy women of the same age from other research.

The study did have several limitations, such as a lack of a third study group, the inability to draw conclusions on the persistent effect of the films and that the control group wasn't allowed to watch any of the films.

“Disney movies contain catchy songs, likeable characters and memorable phrases and scenes,” wrote study authors. “The stories tend to have a happy ending but usually a bittersweet one. There is drama and sadness, and, eventually, things improve.” Overall, they note, “This may bring back a feeling of relief. Moreover, watching movies on a portable DVD player is an easy and affordable tool.”

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