Mindfulness-Based Approach Addresses Sexual Health Concerns After Cancer Treatment

The virtual intervention was deemed appropriate and involved an acceptable time commitment.

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A mindfulness-based intervention that addresses sexual health concerns is practical and acceptable for breast and gynecologic cancer survivors, according to study findings published in The Journal of Sexual Medicine.

Cancer and its treatment are known to affect the sexual health of survivors. Some estimates suggest that as many as 90% of people who have been treated for breast and gynecological cancers may experience sexual problems. Besides physical issues such as painful sex, people may also experience a host of mental or psychological concerns. Mindfulness-based interventions have shown some promise for women facing sexual health issues after cancer treatment.

“Many cancer survivors experience sexual dysfunction and related distress after diagnosis and well after treatment ends, yet there are few interventions available,” wrote Jessica Gorman, PhD, MPH, of the Oregon State University, and colleagues. “Improved access to effective interventions can improve the delivery of survivorship care and patient outcomes.”

Gorman’s team conducted a study (NCT04559854) to explore the benefits of a mindfulness-based intervention called Mindful After Cancer. The intervention, delivered via video conferencing, was tailored for people who had been successfully treated for breast or gynecological cancers.

The researchers assessed the feasibility of the virtual intervention, which was conducted over an eight-week period. It was offered over two time periods, one prior to and one during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each weekly session was at most two hours long and included guided meditation and group discussion on sexuality after cancer as well as advice for being mindful on a daily basis. The participants were encouraged to engage in activities related to sexual health and mindfulness at home.

A total of 22 women participated in the study. The mean age was 53 years, and the time since cancer diagnosis ranged from one to 27 years. Ten participants were asked to complete an interview two to three months after the intervention.

On average, the participants finished 6.8 sessions, with 77% finding the weekly time commitment acceptable. Both quantitative findings and qualitative feedback from the interviews showed that the women found the intervention acceptable and appropriate.

“Results suggest that virtual delivery of the mindfulness-based intervention is feasible, acceptable, and appropriate for breast and gynecologic cancer survivors,” the researchers concluded.

The team acknowledged that the study was small and lacked a control group. But the fact that one intervention was conducted during the pandemic offered an “opportunity to learn more about the feasibility of the intervention during times of crisis.”

Click here to read the study abstract in the Journal of Sexual Medicine.
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