

# Perceived Exercise Barriers and Facilitators Among Ethnically Diverse Breast Cancer Survivors

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About 2.9 million breast cancer survivors live in the United States and although Caucasian women have the highest incidence of breast cancer, African American and Hispanic/Latina women are more likely to be diagnosed with advanced disease and have higher mortality rates (American Cancer Society, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Explanations for these disparities include differences in breast cancer risk factors such as physical inactivity (American Cancer Society, 2011, 2012a). Ethnic minority populations have grown substantially in the United States since the early 2000s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a, 2011b), which has resulted in an increased need for culturally sensitive breast cancer programs that include health-promotion components (e.g., exercise). Although the body of literature on breast cancer and exercise beliefs or behaviors has expanded in the past decade, most studies primarily have included Caucasian breast cancer survivors.

National percentages of breast cancer survivors meeting physical activity recommendations have ranged from 29%–37%, but physical activity often is not stratified by race and ethnicity (Bellizzi, Rowland, Jeffery, & McNeel, 2005; Blanchard, Courneya, & Stein, 2008). Some studies have found that African American breast cancer survivors are less likely to exercise than Caucasian or Hispanic breast cancer survivors (Irwin et al., 2004; Paxton et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009).

Regular moderate physical activity among breast cancer survivors is associated with improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle strength, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and overall quality of life (QOL), and also is related to decreased mortality (Demark-Wahnefried & Jones, 2008; Ibrahim & Al-Homaidh, 2011; Irwin & Mayne, 2008). Exercise also protects against weight gain, a problem common among breast cancer survivors (Demark-Wahnefried & Jones, 2008). Because of the growing body of evidence on exercise benefits for cancer survivors, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Cancer Society endorsed the

**Purpose/Objectives:** To determine whether women with breast cancer were meeting current physical activity recommendations and to describe perceptions of exercise self-efficacy, exercise benefits and barriers, and perceptions of environmental supports for physical activity by race or ethnicity.

**Design:** Cross-sectional survey.

**Setting:** Community wellness workshops held in various locations in central and eastern North Carolina.

**Sample:** 65 breast cancer survivors in treatment or post-treatment. Caucasian women comprised 46% of the sample followed by African Americans (34%) and Hispanics/Latinas (16%).

**Methods:** Descriptive statistics were used to determine the percentage of women meeting physical activity guidelines and for comparing exercise-related perceptions. Spearman's rho correlation coefficient tests were conducted to identify associations between physical activity and exercise-related perceptions.

**Main Research Variables:** Physical activity, perceived exercise self-efficacy, exercise barriers, and benefits.

**Findings:** Hispanic/Latina women were least likely to meet physical activity recommendations. Hispanic/Latina women were more likely than Caucasian and African American women to report lack of enjoyment from exercise, lack of knowledge on how to exercise, feeling self-conscious because of looks, and discouragement as exercise barriers.

**Conclusions:** In a sociocultural context, exercise beliefs need to be considered in the development of culturally responsive exercise interventions that may enhance the health of breast cancer survivors.

**Implications for Nursing:** Considering the increasing number of breast cancer survivors from diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds, a need exists for culturally competent nursing interventions aimed at increasing exercise. When educating breast cancer survivors, nurses should address sociocultural factors that may hinder or facilitate engagement in exercise.

**Knowledge Translation:** Most women were not meeting physical activity recommendations, particularly Hispanic/Latina women. Perceptions of exercise-related beliefs differed, although not significantly, across racial and ethnic groups. More perceived exercise barriers existed for Hispanic/Latina women compared to Caucasian and African American women, which may indicate sociocultural differences.