Walking and Talking Our Way to Healthier Living

It’s not easy getting up 30 minutes earlier to exercise first thing in the morning, but if I don’t do it then, I usually won’t get to it. Like most new habits, it took me awhile to get into the routine of walking, but now I do it almost daily and feel good about it for the rest of the day. More and more research is pointing to the long-term benefits of physical activity on well-being. Walking is one of the easiest ways to exercise. It increases your energy, improves your mood, and is free. So why is it so hard to do on a regular basis? And why don’t more people do it?

Being physically active is good for our patients, too. Regular exercise can decrease fatigue and improve physical functioning and overall quality of life in patients with cancer. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) convened a panel of expert researchers, including Oncology Nursing Society member and co-chair Anna Schwartz, PhD, RN, FAAN, to develop guidelines for physical activity during and after cancer treatment (Schmitz et al., 2010). Strong evidence indicates that exercise is safe and effective in patients with breast, prostate, colon, hematologic (including hematopoietic stem cell transplantation), and gynecologic malignancies. How many of us recommend a plan for physical activity to our patients? When I see breast cancer survivors in clinic, I routinely ask about their activities and give prescriptions for increasing age, gender, and health status. The benefit of social support was equivalent to quitting smoking and exceeded other known contributors to mortality. The authors challenged us to include social support in our assessments of health behaviors to identify those at greater risk for complications. Maybe that is one of the benefits of the many support groups for cancer and the social support to those who are diagnosed with cancer. How do we assess our patients’ social supports? And how do we encourage them to get the support they need?

While being physically active and giving and receiving social support are important for our patients, they are also good for us. We all are aware of the statistics about the aging nursing workforce. We need to think about how we can take care of ourselves and each other. And I think that is why I most enjoy my weekly Saturday morning hour with my friends as we walk and talk our way to healthier lives. What do you do?

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References
