

Programs to prepare for surgery can improve outcomes and recovery



Prehabilitation aligned with treatment guidelines may enhance recovery in women undergoing surgery for a gynecologic cancer.

INTRODUCTION

Surgery is a common treatment option for many gynecologic cancers. All types of major surgery disturb the body's balance and can affect normal functions. A person's fitness and health before surgery can affect how much her body is disturbed by surgery, and how well she will recover.

Prehabilitation programs are a way of preparing people before they have surgery, with the hope that they will recover better; for example, reducing hospital stays, speeding up how quickly people can return to normal activities, and reducing complications and side effects. These programs include physical exercises, advice on food and nutrition, psychological support, review of any other medical treatment or conditions that a person has, and advice on stopping harmful behaviors such as smoking or drinking alcohol. Currently, these approaches vary among surgeons and treatment centers.

WHAT DID THE AUTHORS HOPE TO LEARN?

The authors wanted to find out how prehabilitation programs affect surgery and recovery in women with gynecologic cancers.

WHO WAS INCLUDED?

This was not a clinical trial or study, so there were no people directly involved. Instead, the authors looked at reports from studies that had already been done to investigate different types of prehabilitation programs for people scheduled to have surgery for cancer, particularly gynecologic cancer. All the studies included were published between January 2000 and April 2018.

HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?

This was a systematic literature review. A systematic review aims to identify all the published evidence on a topic and to summarize the combined results.

The authors used databases of published studies to search for reports on the use of prehabilitation for people undergoing surgery. They then used this information to design a prehabilitation program for women scheduled for surgery for a gynecologic cancer.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY?

The main finding was that prehabilitation programs can improve a person's functioning and how well she recovers after surgery. Programs that include several prehabilitation components (or techniques) rather than just one resulted in better outcomes. For example, people who had done physical activity to build up their strength and who had a nutritious diet had shorter hospital stays after their surgery.

After looking at the studies they found, the authors designed an ideal program to use with women undergoing surgery for a gynecologic cancer. The new program aligns with (or supports) standard treatment guidelines and includes instructions on physical activity, protein supplementation, and relaxation techniques. For women with endometrial or cervical cancer, the program can take place in the 2- to 4-week period between diagnosis and surgery, when any pre-surgery tests are done. For women with ovarian cancer, prehabilitation should start when the disease is suspected or diagnosed, and the program length varies depending on what treatment is being used.

ARE THESE FINDINGS NEW?

There are several hospitals developing similar prehabilitation programs for major cancer surgeries. But the other programs are quite broad and do not line up with standard treatment guidelines.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY?

The main limitation is that, although the new program has been designed, it has not yet been tested.

WHAT DO THE AUTHORS PLAN TO DO WITH THIS INFORMATION?

The authors plan to evaluate the impact of the new prehabilitation program in women with gynecologic cancer. They hope to have results analyzed and published soon.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THIS STUDY HAVE ON PATIENT CARE?

If you need to have surgery for a gynecologic cancer, you might be asked to take part in a prehabilitation program to improve your fitness for the operation. Taking part in the program could mean your surgery goes better, and you may recover quicker afterward and have fewer complications. If you need chemotherapy after your surgery, you may be able to start it sooner if you recovered more quickly from surgery.

If you have any concerns about your disease or its treatment, you should talk to your doctor.

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