

Eli's Rehab Report

Clinical Rehab Roundup: Take This Approach To Treating Breast Cancer Patients' Lymphedema

Active resistance exercise should be in your therapy bag of tricks, research reveals.

Effect of Active Resistive Exercise on Breast Cancer-Related Lymphedema: A Randomized Controlled Trial. Kim do S, Sim YJ, Jeong HJ, Kim GC. Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2010 Dec;91(12):1844-8. Patients suffering from lymphedema related to breast cancer should take an active role in combating the condition -- especially when it comes to exercise.

After investigating the differences between the effects of complex decongestive physiotherapy with active resistance exercise and without it, researchers have found that patients with breast cancer-related lymphedema (BCRL) could benefit from a sticking to the active type, according to "Effect of Active Resistive Exercise on Breast Cancer-Related Lymphedema," a study published in the Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

The study was conducted on 40 patients in an outpatient rehab clinic who were diagnosed with BCRL. Researchers randomly assigned patients to either the active resistance exercise group or non-active resistance exercise group. Those in the active group participated in active resistance for 15 minutes per day, five days per week, over the course of eight weeks. The nonactive resistance group only performed complex decongestive physical therapy.

To determine results, researchers measured the circumferences of the upper limbs for volume changes and supplied participants with a quality-of-life questionnaire at pre-treatment and post-treatment.

Outcome: Not only did active resistance exercise not cause additional swelling, patients who were prescribed this type of treatment saw significant reduction in proximal arm volume. Those in the active group also reported higher quality of life scores.

Takeaway: Incorporating active resistance into your treatment plan for patients with BCRL could decrease swelling -- and that alone can help your patients better perform the activities of daily life, which leads to improved quality of life.