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Can Mediterranean diet improve fatigue in cancer survivors?

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Background: Cancer-related Fatigue is a common symptom in many cancer survivors. It may be influenced by a variety of demographic, medical, psychosocial, behavioural and biological factors. The complexity of the etiology of fatigue, as well as the symptoms experienced by the patients themselves have led scientists to suggest various interventions in order to treat this fatigue. These interventions are divided in pharmacologic treatments and non-pharmacologic treatments. The latter include exercise, rest, cognitive interventions and nutrition.

Purpose: The aim of our interventional pilot study was to evaluate whether Mediterranean Diet would improve the cancer-related fatigue syndrome experienced by cancer survivors.

Methodology: A study with two groups of cancer survivors (≥ 3 months and ≤ 5 years since primary treatment) was carried out. The Control group (n=18) and the Intervention group (n=21). Follow up was set at 4 weeks. The Control group received only general nutritional advice, whereas the Intervention group was provided with personalized Mediterranean Diet menus that were generated by a Clinical Decision Support System. The FACIT Fatigue Scale was used to assess Cancer-related fatigue. Med Diet Score was used to assess adherence to Mediterranean Diet.

Findings: At the study endpoint, significant ameliorations in cancer-related fatigue were recorded in the Intervention compared to Control group ($p < 0.05$). 83% of the intervention group participants showed higher score in FACIT Fatigue scale, meaning better Quality of Life after the 4-week intervention. Participants in the control group showed a 28% increase in FACIT Fatigue scale. Moreover, 89% of the participants in the Intervention group displayed a higher score in Med Diet Score, revealing their adherence to the Mediterranean Diet menus they were given.

Conclusions: Mediterranean Diet can play a vital role in dealing with cancer-related fatigue in cancer survivors. More studies though, are needed to empower these findings.

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