Linköping University Medical Dissertations No. 900

Applied relaxation as treatment of vasomotor symptoms in postmenopausal women

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Akademisk avhandling

som för avläggande av medicine doktorsexamen vid Hälsouniversitetet i Linköping kommer

att offentligen försvaras i Berzeliussalen, Hälsouniversitetet,

torsdagen den 22 september 2005 kl 13.00

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Abstract

Vasomotor symptoms often disturb the night sleep and may lead to tiredness and mood disturbances. Many women who suffer from vasomotor symptoms ask for medical help and are often prescribed hormonal treatment. The drug of choice has been estrogen usually combined with progestagens (HRT) or estrogen only (ERT) if the uterus has been removed and there is no risk of endometrial hyperplasia or cancer. The use of HRT has increased over the past several decades: up to around 50% of the population of postmenopausal women in our country. During the last years the popularity of HRT among women and doctors has again decreased, probably because of the findings of long-term risks of HRT on breast cancer and the fact that the positive effects on cardiovascular health has not been confirmed in prospective randomised studies. The most effective treatment for hot flushes is HRT but for various reasons there is a need for developing alternative treatments. Acupuncture has been tried for healthy women with vasomotor symptoms, but not for women with breast cancer. Relaxation therapy and behavioural therapies have been suggested for vasomotor symptoms but there are few randomised, controlled studies in this field, especially in women with breast cancer.
The general aim of this thesis was to evaluate a behaviour therapy, applied relaxation, as a possible treatment of vasomotor symptoms in healthy women and women treated for breast cancer. The specific aims were:

to assess if stress coping differed between postmenopausal women, who wanted therapy for vasomotor symptoms and postmenopausal women without symptoms and to assess if stress coping changed when women with vasomotor symptoms received estrogen therapy. 18 women were recruited to the target group and 17 women to the comparison group

to evaluate if training applied relaxation for 12 weeks would decrease the number of vasomotor symptoms and to evaluate if applied relaxation for 12 weeks would affect wellbeing in postmenopausal women seeking medical advice for vasomotor symptoms. 30 postmenopausal women were recruited and randomized to applied relaxation or estrogen therapy. In this study we also aimed to compare applied relaxation and estradiol as treatment of vasomotor symptoms in healthy postmenopausal women and also to compare the effects of applied relaxation and estradiol on wellbeing in healthy postmenopausal women

to evaluate if applied relaxation or electro-acupuncture for 12 weeks would decrease the number of vasomotor symptoms in postmenopausal women treated for breast cancer and to evaluate if applied relaxation or electro-acupuncture for 12 weeks would affect wellbeing in postmenopausal women treated for breast cancer. 38 women with breast cancer and with moderate to sever vasomotor symptoms were recruited.

In summary: This thesis shows that that behavioral therapy with applied relaxation is a viable alternative treatment of vasomotor symptoms in healthy postmenopausal women and in women treated for breast cancer. Applied relaxation does ameliorate psychological wellbeing in healthy postmenopausal women and breast cancer treated women, when their flushes are reduced.