

Motivating Breast Cancer Survivors to Exercise

Women will come to Strength ABC with various levels of motivation to start the program. They will also vary broadly regarding their ability to sustain the program at home, once they learn it.

There are a broad variety of approaches that can be used to motivate individuals to adhere to an exercise regimen. The one used successfully in the Physical Activity and Lymphedema (PAL) Trial upon which the Strength After Breast Cancer is based – is called Motivational Interviewing (MI). It started in the addiction counseling world and is research based. There are over 200 peer-reviewed scientific publications of randomized controlled trials that have successfully used MI to change behavior.

Participants in the PAL Study showed remarkable adherence to the program using this motivational method. Among women *with* lymphedema, 88% of prescribed sessions were completed over the year-long intervention. Among women *at risk for* lymphedema, 78% of prescribed sessions were completed.

Motivational Interviewing is a patient-centered approach that assists participants to think and talk about their own reasons to change. Over many studies, this has been shown to minimize resistance and increase motivation.

Motivational Interviewing accepts that ambivalence about change is a normal human experience and often a necessary step in the process of change. It encourages counselors to work with a patient's ambivalence rather than viewing it as a problem. It also aims to encourage the patient's autonomy in decision making. The trainer acts as a guide, clarifying strengths and aspirations, listening to concerns, boosting confidence in their own ability to change, and eventually collaborating on a plan for change.

To best learn how to do MI, a therapist or program instructor should find a full-length program they can complete in person; practice is the key. However, many YMCAs offer a 3-hour program on the basics of Motivational Interviewing called 'Listen First.' There are also many online courses. For a free one, go to BMJ Learning, <http://learning.bmj.com/learning/home.html>, and then search for "10051582," which is "Motivational Interviewing in Brief Consultations."