

Web-based help improves quality of life for cancer patients

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A diagnosis of cancer causes huge psychological stress, but many patients do not receive any psychological support. An online stress management program can significantly improve their quality of life, as shown by a study conducted by researchers from the University of Basel and University Hospital Basel, and published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*.

A [cancer](#) diagnosis always causes psychological distress, which impairs quality of life and may also have a negative impact on treatment and disease progression.

Ideally cancer treatment is coupled with psychological support. However, currently only a minority of cancer [patients](#) receive professional psychological support, particularly during the difficult time immediately after diagnosis.

Actively reduce distress

In order to reach cancer patients early after diagnosis and offer a low-threshold tool to overcome distress, researchers from the University of Basel and University Hospital Basel developed the online [stress management program](#) STREAM.

During the 8-week online program, patients were provided with information, individual exercises on downloadable audio-files and specific strategies on managing life with cancer. Patients logged in using a secured personal account. Once a week, they participated in a written exchange with a psychologist via an integrated email platform.

First study in German-speaking countries

The study from Basel University is the first to show that newly diagnosed cancer patients significantly benefit from a web-based intervention and report better quality of life and less distress.

In total, 129 patients from Switzerland, Germany

and Austria were allocated to either an intervention or a control group within 12 weeks of starting their [cancer treatment](#). The control group only received access to the program after an eight-week waiting period, enabling a comparison between the two groups.

People who completed the STREAM program (mostly [breast cancer patients](#)) assessed their quality of life as significantly higher than the control group. Also, distress, measured on a scale from 0 to 10, was significantly lower in the online group than in the [control group](#) after the intervention.

"The results show that web-based self-help with regular email contact with a psychologist has the potential to efficiently support newly diagnosed [cancer patients](#) and thereby decisively improves cancer care," says Professor Viviane Hess, Professor of Medical Oncology and Senior Oncologist in Basel.

Online interventions present new opportunities to support people affected by cancer who previously could not be reached. "Digital natives are reaching the age at which the risk for age-related diseases such as cancer increases. Approaches that integrate the internet into patient care will therefore continue to increase in importance," says Hess.

More information: Corinne Urech et al. Web-Based Stress Management for Newly Diagnosed Patients With Cancer (STREAM): A Randomized, Wait-List Controlled Intervention Study, *Journal of Clinical Oncology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1200/JCO.2017.74.8491](#)

Provided by University Hospital Basel

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