

CHALLENGES AND UNMET NEEDS IN MANAGING DIETARY INTAKE AND EATING BEHAVIOR AMONG ESOPHAGEAL CANCER SURVIVORS

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Introduction

Esophageal cancer survivors experience treatment-related symptoms including dumping syndrome, reflux, and gastroparesis which affected the process of dietary intake and quality of life (QoL).

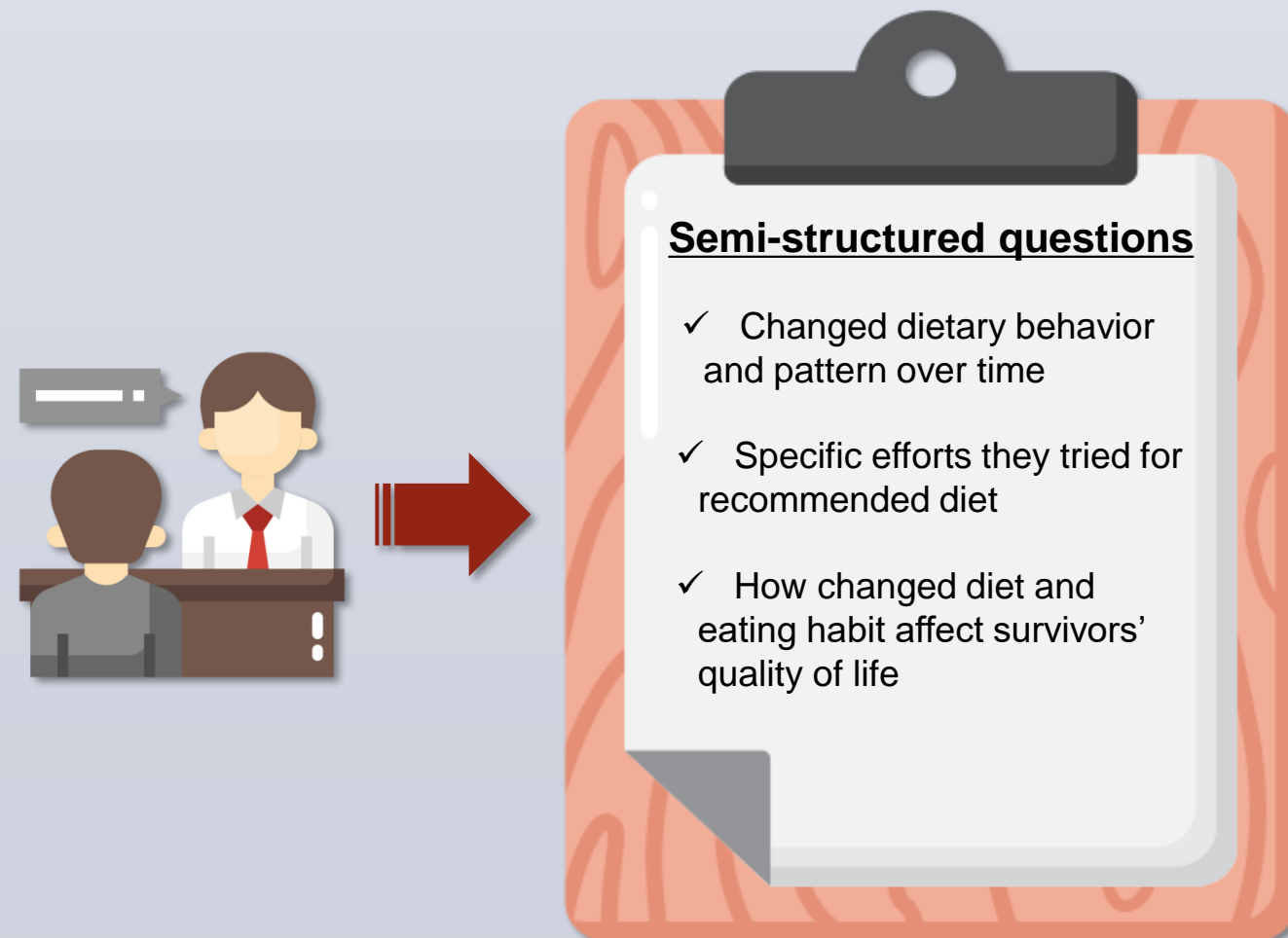
Limited studies reported detailed challenges and unmet needs of dietary intake and eating behavior among esophageal cancer survivors.

Objective

We conducted a qualitative study to understand specific challenges and unmet needs in dietary intake and eating behavior among esophageal cancer survivors.

Methods

- In-depth individual interviews:
 - 27 esophageal cancer survivors
 - Either before or undergoing treatment
 - Recruited from a university-affiliated cancer center in Seoul, Korea from July 2023 to October 2023.



Results

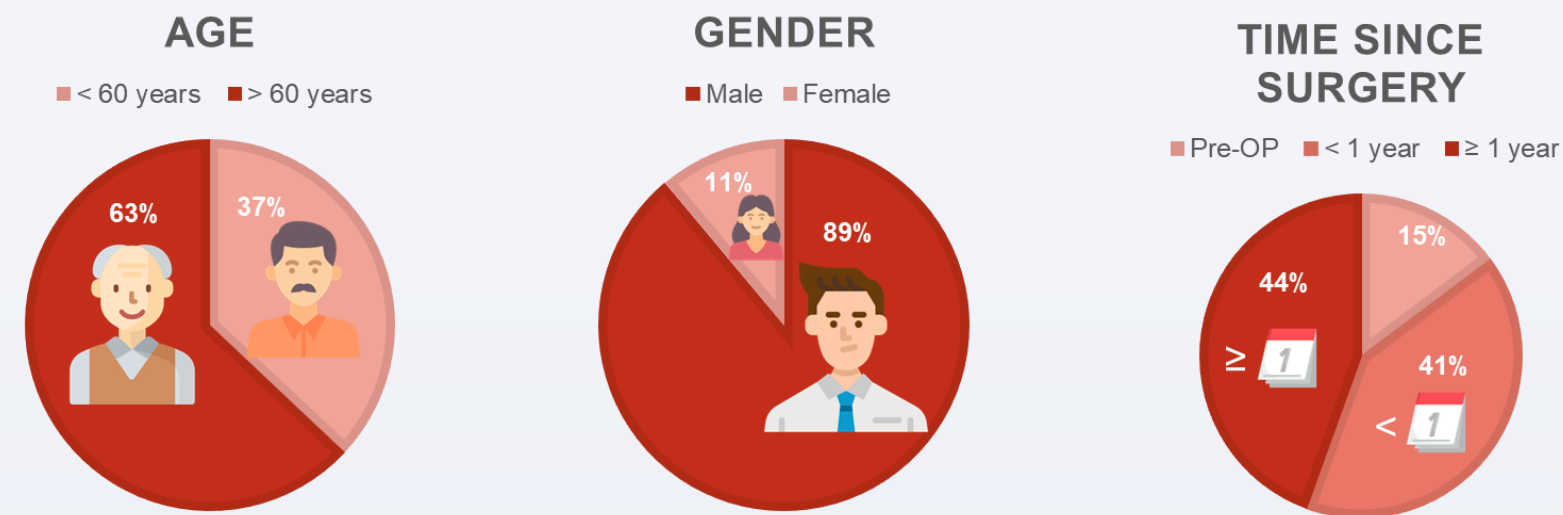


Figure 1. Characteristics of patients



Challenges after diagnosis



Dietary intake pattern

- Having at least 4-6 small meals / day
- Preparing meal with sufficient protein and vegetable
- Having meal at a set time
- Need to control the proportion of meal to prevent physical symptoms



Eating behavior

- Trying to eat slowly (average 20 minutes)
- Avoiding spicy or greasy food
- Preparing home-cooked meal rather than eating out
- Mainly cooked by grilling or boiling
- Trying to eat food that felt fewer physical symptoms



Unmet needs in dietary intake and eating behavior

Nutritional information

- Misunderstand about healthy diet
- Difficulties in how to find nutritional information

Physical burden

- Reflux
- Difficulty in swallowing
- Reduced physical function
- Fatigue
- Bloating
- Loss of appetite or losing weight
- Pain

Psychosocial burden

- Anxiety/depression
- Reduced pleasure of eating
- Social isolation
- Fear of recurrence
- Changing occupation

Support needs for preparing meal

- Difficulties in managing meal schedule with sufficient nutrient, especially during eating out
- Need meal subscription service to prevent overeating

Figure 2. Challenges and unmet needs in managing dietary intake and eating behavior

Discussion

Patients tried to follow recommended eating behavior such as eating higher calories and protein, eating at least 4-6 small meals per day, and having healthy diet at a set time.

The most challenges after diagnosis among esophageal cancer survivors was **getting enough nutrition with less symptom burden**.

Patients could not eat what they used to enjoy.

Most patients had difficulties in managing meal schedule and healthy diet with sufficient nutrient, especially when they ate out.

Patients who were old and who prepared the meal by themselves seemed to experience more challenges expressing unmet needs of nutritional information.

They had difficulties in preparing small portion meals with sufficient protein and another healthy ingredient.

Dietary intake affected their physical function, reduced pleasure of eating, and social isolation.

More tailored dietary intervention would be necessary for esophageal cancer survivors.

References

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