Exploration of High-Intensity Interval Training for Breast Cancer Survivors: Taking a Home-based Approach Toward New Normal

Katsunori Tsuji
National Cancer Center Japan: Kokuritsu Gan Kenkyu Center

Yutaka J. Matsuoka
National Cancer Center Japan: Kokuritsu Gan Kenkyu Center

Eisuke Ochi (ochi@hosei.ac.jp)
Hosei University  https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2497-0250

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Abstract

Background

To review the methods and outcomes of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) interventions for breast cancer survivors, and to explore the feasibility of prescribing exercise for breast cancer survivors.

Methods

A systematic search of electronic databases was conducted for studies published up to May 31, 2020. Eligibility criteria included randomized controlled trials of HIIT intervention in breast cancer survivors. Studies were grouped by whether the intervention was conducted during or after breast cancer treatment, and intervention methods and outcomes were reviewed within each group.

Results

Twenty-six studies were identified, and 13 satisfied the inclusion criteria. Intervention was conducted during treatment in 8 studies, and after treatment in 5. Intervention duration ranged from 3 to 16 weeks, with 2 or 3 sessions per week, for a total of 9 to 36 sessions. All interventions were supervised; 12 were lab-based, and 1 was community-based. One of most promising outcomes was improvement of cardiorespiratory fitness by HIIT.

Conclusion

This review found that most studies on HIIT for breast cancer survivors investigated lab-based, supervised interventions. HIIT is a time-efficient method for increasing cardiovascular function in breast cancer survivors, but further research is necessary to determine its effects on other outcomes.

Implications For Cancer Survivors

HIIT is an effective exercise method for increasing physical fitness in breast cancer survivors, but there is currently no evidence of benefit from home-based HIIT. Confirmatory studies on the effects of home-based exercise programs might be required to promote the dissemination and implementation of HIIT.

1. Background

The strong association between physical activity and all-cause mortality risk in breast cancer survivors [1] has led experts to recommend that breast cancer survivors engage in physical activity and exercise [2] and prompted researchers to investigate exercise interventions for this population. Combination of aerobic training and resistance training is considered particularly effective [2].

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) interventions have recently been proposed as a promising method for quickly improving fitness. HIIT consists of repeated sets of short bursts of high-intensity exercise followed by a rest interval, and has been shown improve fitness in both athletes and the general population [3, 4]. In recent years, research on the suitability of HIIT for cancer survivors has emerged as well. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of HIIT for cardiorespiratory fitness in cancer survivors have already shown HIIT to have some degree of effectiveness [5, 6]. Research on HIIT for breast cancer survivors was first published around 2016, but no review article focusing exclusively on breast cancer survivors has been published to date.
Therefore, this review of HIIT interventions in breast cancer survivors was conducted with a focus on intervention methods and timing. The specific characteristics of interest were (1) timing (during or after treatment), (2) supervision (supervised or unsupervised), and (3) setting (lab-based, community-based, or home-based). In addition, in light of concerns that sheltering in place during the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic of 2020 will lead to inadequate physical activity and consequently increased risk of cardiovascular disease worldwide [7], this review will also explore the current landscape and future possibilities of home-based, unsupervised exercise interventions.

2. Methods

The PRISMA checklist was used for this review [8].

2.1 Information sources and search strategy

Electronic databases (PubMed, Cochran Library, Web of Science, and Igaku Chuo Zasshi) were searched for studies published up to May 31, 2020. The search expression used was as follows;

"breast cancer"[Title/Abstract] AND ("high intensity interval"[Title/Abstract] OR "high intensity intermittent" [Title/Abstract] OR "aerobic interval"[Title/Abstract]) AND (exercise OR training) AND (randomized controlled trial[pt] OR controlled clinical trial[pt] OR randomized[tiab] OR placebo[tiab] OR randomly[tiab] OR trial[tiab] OR groups[tiab] NOT (animals [mh] NOT humans [mh]))

All studies with keywords related to HIIT interventions for breast cancer survivors were included.

2.2 Inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria were studies published in English and Japanese (only those with full text available) that included HIIT in the intervention and were conducted in breast cancer survivors. HIIT was defined as exercise consisting of multiple repetitions of short bursts (≤4 min) of high-intensity (≥90% of maximal oxygen uptake [VO$_{2}$max], peak oxygen uptake [VO$_{2}$peak] or maximum heart rate [HRmax], or rating of perceived exertion [RPE] ≥ 18) aerobic exercise (e.g., running or cycling) alternated with low-intensity exercise or passive rest. Studies of interventions that combined HIIT with resistance training or aerobic training were also included in the review. When multiple datasets were available from the same research group or follow-up data were available for the same cohort of participants, the earliest published dataset was used.

2.3 Study selection and data extraction

Irrelevant articles were excluded from the review by screening the titles and abstracts displayed in the search results. Next, methods of intervention (exercise duration/frequency, exercise intensity, mode of exercise, HIIT intervals, and intervention setting) and outcomes (cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle strength, indicators of cardiotoxicity/cardiovascular function, health-related quality of life [HRQOL], fatigue, related biomarkers, adverse events, and compliance) were determined by reviewing the full text. The full text was reviewed by two of the authors (KT and EO). These outcomes were selected to investigate the effects of HIIT on physical function as the
primary outcome of interest, as well as the effects of HIIT on areas of clinical concern for breast cancer survivors (HRQOL, fatigue, and cardiotoxicity/cardiovascular function) and safety of and compliance with HIIT among breast cancer survivors.

3. Results

3.1 Search outcome

A total of 93 search results were obtained from the four databases, but 26 were duplicates and were therefore excluded. After screening, 9 studies were excluded from the review based on their title and abstract, and 2 more studies were excluded because they were follow-up studies of the same cohort. After the full text of the remaining studies was carefully reviewed, an additional 2 studies were excluded for not meeting the exercise intensity criteria described in the Methods section. Finally, a total of 13 studies satisfied the inclusion criteria (Fig. 1).

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the studies included in the review. Table 1 lists interventions conducted during breast cancer treatment, and Table 2 lists interventions conducted after initial cancer treatment. Each table lists the authors, sample size, a summary of the HIIT program, outcomes, whether the intervention was supervised or unsupervised, and the intervention setting (lab-based, community-based, or home-based) for each study. Summaries of the HIIT programs include the duration of training, frequency, mode of exercise, intensity, and intervals.
| Study                              | Sample size | HIIT Duration and frequency (total times) | HIIT Mode | HIIT Intensity | Interval or recovery durations | Supervised OR Unsupervised | Lab-based OR Home and community-based |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Lee et al. (2019a,b, 2020)        | 30          | 8 weeks, 3×/week (24)                    | Cycle ergometer | 90% PPO        | 7×1 min cycling, 2 min active recovery, total 19 min | Supervised by exercise trainer | Lab-based                           |
| Mijwel et al. (2020)              | 182         | 16 weeks, 2×/week (32)                  | Cycle ergometer | 16-18 RPE      | 3×3 min cycling, 1 min passive recovery, total 11 min | Supervised by exercise physiologist or oncology nurse | Lab-based                           |
| Mijwel et al. (2018)              | 23          | 16 weeks, 2×/week (32)                  | Cycle ergometer | 16-18 RPE      | 3×3 min cycling, 1 min passive recovery, total 11 min | Supervised by exercise physiologist or oncology nurse | Lab-based                           |
| Mijwel et al. (2018a,b)           | 206         | 16 weeks, 2×/week (32)                  | Cycle ergometer | 16-18 RPE      | 3×3 min cycling, 1 min passive recovery, total 11 min | Supervised by exercise physiologist or oncology nurse | Lab-based                           |
| Schulz et al. (2018)              | 16          | 6 weeks, 2×/week (12)                   | Cycle ergometer | 85-100%VO₂peak | 10×1 min cycling, 1 min loadless recovery, total 19 min | Supervised by professional | Lab-based                           |
Table 2  
Characteristics of the included studies with intervention after treatment

| Study                      | Sample size | HIIT Duration and frequency | HIIT Mode | HIIT Intensity       | Interval and recovery durations                                      | Supervised or Unsupervised                      | Lab-based or Home and community-based |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Alizadeh AM et al. (2019)  | 52          | 12 weeks, 3×/week (36)      | Treadmill | 90-95% HRmax         | 4×4 min running, 3 min passive recovery, total 25 min               | Supervised by exercise physiologist           | Lab-based                            |
| Alizadeh S et al. (2019)   | 80          | 12 weeks, 3×/week (36)      | Treadmill | 90-95% HRmax         | 4×4 min running, 3 min passive recovery, total 25 min               | Supervised by exercise physiologist           | Lab-based                            |
| Northey et al. (2019)      | 17          | 12 weeks, 3×/week (36)      | Cycle ergometer | Maximal effort       | 4×30 s, 2 min rest, total 10 min                                    | Supervised, supervisor not described          | Lab-based                            |
| Schmitt et al. (2016)      | 16          | 3 weeks, 3×/week (9)        | Outdoor   | ≥95% HRmax           | 8×1 min group walking, 2 min slow walking, total 22 min             | Supervised, supervisor not described          | Community-based                      |
| Dolan et al. (2016)        | 33          | 6 weeks, 3×/week (18)       | Treadmill | Initial: 65% VO₂peak, Interval 50% VO₂peak, Last: 95% VO₂peak, Interval: < 60% VO₂peak | First week: 4-6×4 min, 3 min interval, total 25-39 min last week: 4-6×2 min, 2 min interval, total 25-39 min | Supervised, supervisor not described          | Lab-based                            |

3.2 Intervention timing (during or after treatment)

Eight studies involved interventions during breast cancer treatment and 5 involved interventions after treatment. Of the 8 interventions conducted during treatment, 3 were conducted by Lee et al., 4 by Mijwel et al., and 1 by Schulz et al. The intervention was started at the same time as chemotherapy in 7 of those 8 studies. In the remaining study, the participants received chemotherapy before and during the intervention. Two of the studies of interventions conducted after treatment revealed the timing of the intervention: participants in the studies by Alizadeh AM et al. and Alizadeh S et al. started the intervention no earlier than 1 month after completing chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy. The studies by Northey et al., Schmidt et al., and Dolan et al. did not specify the timing of the intervention.
3.3 Exercise supervision

No studies of unsupervised HIIT have been conducted to date, and thus all the studies in this review investigated supervised interventions. Three of the 13 studies did not specify who supervised the intervention. In those that did specify, the supervisor was an exercise trainer [9-12], an exercise physiologist [13-18], or an oncology nurse [13-16]. In Mijwel et al., the intervention was supervised by an exercise physiologist or oncology nurse. In Schulz et al., the intervention was supervised by a professional, but no further details were provided [19].

3.4 Lab-based HIIT or community-based HIIT

Twelve of the 13 studies investigated lab-based interventions. All of the lab-based interventions conducted during breast cancer treatment used a cycle ergometer. Three of the interventions conducted after treatment used a treadmill, and one used a cycle ergometer. The study by Schmitt et al. was the only one that investigated a community-based intervention, specifically outdoor group walking [20].

3.5 Exercise training protocols

Studies were sorted by HIIT protocol. The 13 studies included multiple studies conducted by the same research groups. In the group of studies on interventions during breast cancer treatment, Lee et al. (3 of 13 studies) had participants perform 7 sets consisting of 1 min of exercise at 90% peak power output determined by cardiopulmonary exercise testing, followed by 2 min of active rest, repeated 3 times per week for 8 weeks [9-11]. Mijwel et al. (4 of 13 studies) had participants perform 3 sets consisting of 3 min of exercise at RPE of 16 to 18 followed by 1 min of passive rest, repeated twice weekly for 16 weeks[13-16]. They also had participants perform resistance training (RT-HIIT group) or aerobic training (AT-HIIT group) 3 times a week on the days they did not perform HIIT. Resistance training consisted of 2 or 3 sets of 12 repetitions of resistance training exercises for 9 different muscle groups at 70% to 80% of their one-repetition maximum (1RM). aerobic training consisted of 20 min of cycling at an RPE of 13 to 15. Schulz et al. had participants perform HIIT and resistance training as a group twice weekly for 6 weeks [19]. For HIIT, participants performed 3 sets consisting of 3 min of exercise on a cycle ergometer at an intensity of 85% to 100% VO₂max followed by 1 min of active rest. For resistance training, they performed 8 to 12 repetitions of resistance training exercises for major muscle groups at 60% to 80% 1RM.

In the group of studies involving interventions after initial breast cancer treatment, Alizadeh AM et al. and Alizadeh S had participants perform 4 sets consisting of 4 min of inclined running at an intensity of 90% to 95% HRmax followed by 3 min of passive rest, repeated 3 times weekly for 12 weeks [17, 18]. Northey et al. had participants perform 4 sets consisting of 30 s of maximum-intensity pedaling following by 2 min of rest, repeated 3 times weekly for 12 weeks [21]. Schmitt et al. conducted an outdoor group exercise intervention in which participants performed 8 sets consisting of 1 min of walking at ≥95% HRmax followed by 2 min of slow walking, repeated 3 times weekly for 3 weeks [20]. Dolan et al. had participants perform an HIIT program on a treadmill that involved incrementally increasing exercise intensity over the intervention period in 3 weekly sessions for 6 weeks. The intervention started with 4 to 6 sets of 4-min running at 65% VO₂max at 3-min intervals (50% VO₂peak), but the intensity was increased to 90% VO₂peak at the 13th session in Week 5, and ultimately to 4 to 6 sets of 2-min running at 95% VO₂peak at 2-min intervals (< 60% VO₂peak) in the final week (Week 6) [22].
### 3.6 Outcomes

Studies were also grouped by outcomes (cardiorespiratory fitness, muscle strength, indicators of cardiotoxicity/cardiovascular function, HRQOL, fatigue, related biomarkers, adverse events, and compliance). Six studies evaluated cardiorespiratory fitness, all using VO$_2$peak. Three studies evaluated muscle strength, 2 using 1RM and 1 using maximum isometric contraction. One study evaluated cardiovascular function, and used endothelial function in terms of brachial artery flow mediated dilation (baFMD) and carotid intima-media thickness (cIMT) as an indicator. One study evaluated HRQOL, and used the European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire-Core 30 (EORTC QLQ-C30) [13]. Two studies evaluated fatigue, one using the 22-item Piper Fatigue Scale (PFS) [13] and 1 using the Multidimensional Fatigue Inventory (MFI) [20].

Twelve studies evaluated HIIT compliance. The compliance rates in each study were as follows. Lee et al. reported an HIIT compliance rate of 82.3% across their studies. Mijwell et al. reported a compliance rate of 80% to 83% for HIIT plus resistance training and 57% to 75% for HIIT plus aerobic training across their studies. Schulz et al. and Alizadeh AM et al. reported HIIT compliance rates of 97% and 85%, respectively. Northey et al. reported an HIIT compliance rate of 78.7% across their studies. Schmitt et al. reported an HIIT compliance rate of 93% across their studies. Dolan et al. reported a compliance rate of 99% for aerobic interval training. None of the studies that evaluated adverse events associated with HIIT reported any such events.

### 4. Discussion

HIIT interventions during breast cancer treatment have been aimed at preventing or reducing cardiovascular effects of chemotherapy since Schulz et al. first investigated the feasibility of such interventions in 2018. HIIT interventions for breast cancer survivors have been investigated in only 4 studies since Dolan et al. published their study in 2016, and these studies have only investigated a narrow range of outcomes such as safety and cardiorespiratory fitness. Especially, there is no evidence to validate the efficacy of home-based HIIT, and future research results are awaited. The main findings of this review are that all HIIT interventions for breast cancer survivors to date were supervised, and nearly all were lab-based. Breast cancer survivors may face several challenges when trying to start exercising, including that resistance training and aerobic training are time-consuming, that gym memberships and exercise classes are expensive, and that access to exercise facilities may depend on where they live. In fact, the top responses in a survey that asked breast cancer survivors about barriers to exercising were lack of time and lack of access to facilities [23]. Therefore, home-based HIIT programs for breast cancer survivors will be necessary to overcome these barriers. In the following sections, individual aspects of the reviewed studies are discussed.

#### 4.1 Exercise supervision

In all past studies of interventions during breast cancer treatment, the intervention was supervised by an exercise professionals or oncology nurse. In all past studies of interventions after breast cancer treatment, the intervention was also supervised by an exercise professionals. Since the first study of HIIT intervention after breast cancer treatment was conducted in 2016[22], and thus only its feasibility and efficacy such as cardiorespiratory fitness have been investigated to date. A study comparing supervised and unsupervised HIIT interventions in healthy adults [24] showed that supervised interventions produced greater improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness, but
unsupervised interventions still produced significant improvements. Another study of unsupervised HIIT in which participants exercised alone also showed improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness [25].

4.2 Lab-based HIIT or community-based HIIT

All past studies of interventions during breast cancer treatment were lab-based. Possible reasons for this include that the purpose of these studies was to evaluate safety or feasibility, and that exercise intensity was exactly defined to validate the efficacy of HIIT. Nearly all past studies of interventions after breast cancer treatment were also lab-based. Similarly, possible reasons for this include that the purpose of these studies was to evaluate feasibility, and that exercise intensity was precisely defined to validate the efficacy of HIIT. Only 1 study was community-based. Unlike in the lab-based studies, the intervention in this study required no exercise equipment and allowed one supervisor to instruct a large number of participants at once [20]. In recent years, an increasing number of studies on HIIT for the general population have investigated home-based HIIT interventions [24, 26]. Their results suggest that such interventions are effective for maintaining and improving cardiorespiratory fitness. Home-based HIIT for breast cancer survivors has only ever been investigated in 1 study protocol [27]. In that study, participants performed bodyweight HIIT exercises at home, and their exercise was monitored with a wearable device [27]. Recent review paper has shown that home-based exercise is an effective method for promoting exercise in cancer survivors [28]. Future studies will need to determine how to assist people in engaging in these kinds of home-based exercise programs.

4.3 Exercise training protocols

The following subsections discuss about frequency and period, type of exercise, intensity, and exercise and recovery intervals in the studies reviewed.

Frequency and intervention period

The period of HIIT interventions during breast cancer chemotherapy ranged from 6 [19] to 16 weeks [13-16]. The 16-week intervention was a combined intervention with resistance training or aerobic training. The longest HIIT-only interventions were 8 weeks [9-11]. The frequency of sessions during the intervention period was 3 times per week in 3 studies and twice per week in 5 studies. The smallest total number of sessions was 12, and the largest was 36.

The period of HIIT interventions for survivors in studies reviewed in this article ranged from 3 to 12 weeks. The frequency of sessions during the intervention period was 3 times per week in all 5 studies. The smallest total number of sessions was 9, and the largest was 36. In a study investigating the frequency and period of interval training programs, Edward Fox found that a 7-week HIIT program conducted 2 days per week produced comparable improvement in VO$_2$max to a 7- or 13-week HIIT program conducted 4 days per week [29]. The study also found that training 2 days a week produced comparable improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness to training 4 days a week, and other studies reviewed in the present article also showed that a frequency of 2 to 3 times per week improves cardiorespiratory fitness [29]. Based on this evidence, a frequency of 2 to 3 times per week can be considered appropriate for HIIT interventions for breast cancer survivors. A study of a 3-week intervention [20] showed no significant improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness, but a study of a 6-week intervention [22] showed
significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that an intervention period of at least 6 weeks is necessary for HIIT to be effective.

**Type of exercise**

The mode of training was exercise on a cycle ergometer in all studies of interventions during cancer treatment. These studies likely selected a cycle ergometer because they decided to use VO$_2$max as an indicator of exercise intensity during training in order to evaluate safety and feasibility of HIIT during breast cancer treatment, and a cycle ergometer allows for quantification of work. The mode of training in studies in cancer survivors was a treadmill in 3 studies [17, 18, 22], cycling in 1 study [21], and outdoor walking in 1 study [20]. Almost all past studies of HIIT in subjects other than breast cancer survivors used equipment that allows for quantification of work (e.g., a cycle ergometer or treadmill) because VO$_2$max was set as the indicator of exercise intensity. Exercise intensity is the most important factor in HIIT, and thus it is ideal to be able to quantify work. However, this requires exercise equipment, which makes such programs unfeasible for widespread implementation. Interestingly, Schmitt et al. used an outdoor walking intervention that utilized bodyweight in their study [20], but did not observe any improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness. This indicates that walking-based HIIT may not be intense enough to improve cardiorespiratory fitness.

**Intensity**

In all of the studies of interventions during treatment, the relative exercise intensity set at the start of the intervention was maintained until the end of the intervention, which would have resulted in the absolute intensity increasing over the duration of training. It is best to use a physiological index to calculate exercise intensity during HIIT, but Mijwel et al. used a rating of perceived exertion of 16 to 18 in their study. Past studies of home-based HIIT interventions that used the “talk test” (intensity should be great enough that talking is difficult) [25] or a modified Borg scale score of 6 to 8 (“very hard”) [30] as an indicator of exercise intensity showed significant improvement in the primary endpoint of cardiorespiratory fitness. Therefore, even though Mijwel et al. may have used a slightly lower or unclear exercise intensity for HIIT compared with other studies, that intensity may have been sufficient to increase VO$_2$max.

In studies of interventions in survivors, the relative exercise intensity set at the start of the intervention was maintained until the end of the intervention in 4 of 5 studies, and the relative exercise intensity was increased incrementally from the start of the intervention in 1 study. Northey et al. (21) had participants pedal at maximum intensity for 30 s, which was likely the most intense burst of exercise out of all 5 studies (and also including interventions during cancer treatment).

**Interval and recovery durations**

In studies of interventions during treatment, the exercise and recovery intervals differed greatly depending on the HIIT exercise intensity. In the HIIT programs investigated in these studies, the exercise interval ranged from 1 to 3 min, the recovery interval from 1 to 2 min, the number of sets from 3 to 10, and the total exercise duration from 11 to 19 min.
In the HIIT programs used in studies of cancer survivors, the exercise interval ranged from 30 s to 4 min, the recovery interval from 2 to 3 min, number of sets from 4 to 8, and total exercise duration from 10 to 39 min. HIIT is currently attracting global interest, and there is ongoing debate about its methodology. As such, the optimal exercise interval, recovery interval, and number of sets have not yet been established, and studies on HIIT should consider these aspects alongside exercise intensity and feasibility. High intensity is most important to maximize the effects of HIIT. Northey et al., whose intervention used the most intense bursts of exercise of any study included in this review, had participants perform 4 sets consisting of 30 s of maximum-intensity pedaling followed by 2 min of rest. This method is similar to ones used for the healthy general population and athletes [31]. This indicates that exercise and recovery intervals in HIIT for breast cancer survivors can be investigated using methods similar to HIIT for the healthy general population. It will be necessary to develop a program with the most efficient exercise and recovery intervals optimized for breast cancer survivors on the basis of findings from studies on HIIT conducted to date.

4.4 Outcomes

Cardiorespiratory fitness

Of the 3 studies of interventions during treatment that evaluated cardiorespiratory fitness, 1 found that the HIIT intervention significantly increased cardiorespiratory fitness, and 2 found no difference. However, the 2 studies that found no difference did find that cardiorespiratory fitness decreased significantly at the end of the study in the control group, indicating that HIIT does prevent the reduction in cardiorespiratory fitness by cancer treatment. Of the 3 studies of interventions for cancer survivors that evaluated cardiorespiratory fitness, 2 found that the HIIT intervention significantly increased cardiorespiratory fitness, and 1 found no difference. The 2 studies that found improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness used equipment that allows for quantification of exercise intensity, namely, a cycle ergometer or treadmill. The reason why the remaining study found no change in cardiorespiratory fitness may be that the intervention was interval speed walking, which has relatively low intensity. Also, the fact that the control group underwent a moderate-intensity training intervention likely had an effect as well. These findings suggest that HIIT has the effectiveness for improving cardiorespiratory fitness in breast cancer survivors.

Muscle strength and muscle mass

Both of the studies of interventions during cancer treatment that evaluated muscle strength showed significant improvements. Mijwell et al. and Schulz et al., who investigated interventions during breast cancer treatment, combined HIIT with resistance training. Mijwell et al. used back muscle strength (measured by isometric contraction) and grip strength to evaluate muscle strength. Schulz et al. used leg press 1RM to evaluate muscle strength. The effect of HIIT alone on muscle strength is not clear from these studies because resistance training had a strong effect. Mijwell et al. also evaluated muscle cross-sectional area (CSA) after the HIIT intervention [15]. In that study, although it is unclear to what degree HIIT contributed to this result, they found that CSA of type II muscle fibers increased significantly and satellite cells increased after their HIIT plus resistance training intervention. Only 1 study of survivors evaluated muscle strength and found a significant increase. Dolan et al. used an intervention consisting solely of aerobic interval training and evaluated muscle strength by leg press 1RM. One study found that lower body muscle strength in breast cancer survivors is lower than or comparable to that in...
the general population [32], and HIIT has been shown to increase lower body muscle mass in healthy young men [33]. Although further evidence is necessary, HIIT shows promise for increasing muscle strength in breast cancer survivors, a population with reduced muscle strength deficit.

**Cardiotoxicity and cardiovascular function**

Two studies of interventions during treatment, both by Lee et al., evaluated the effects of HIIT on cardiotoxicity and vascular endothelial function. Breast cancer chemotherapy can be cardiotoxic, reduce cardiopulmonary function, and damage cardiac muscle tissue. Moderate-intensity exercise interventions added to chemotherapy have been investigated as a means to address these issues, and systematic reviews have shown the efficacy of such interventions [34, 35]. However, the authors noted that research on exercise interventions to reduce cardiotoxicity is still initial stage, and further research into aspects such as intervention timing and intensity is necessary. Based on the findings of this review, Lee et al. conducted an HIIT program aimed at improving vascular endothelial function in patients undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. They found promising evidence that HIIT may reduce cardiotoxicity, including improvements in vascular endothelial function and cardiovascular biomarkers. Further research into the efficacy of high-intensity exercise such as HIIT for reducing cardiotoxicity is necessary to confirm its suitability in cancer survivors.

**HRQOL, fatigue, and biomarkers**

HIIT shows great potential for improving measures of physical function such as cardiorespiratory fitness and muscle strength. However, research on its effects on HRQOL and fatigue is lacking. Only 2 studies evaluated HRQOL, and both showed that HIIT improved HRQOL. Schmitt et al. found that HIIT by group walking significantly increased HRQOL as evaluated by the EORTC QLQ-C30, a comprehensive measure of cancer-specific HRQOL. Three studies evaluated the effects of HIIT on fatigue. Two showed improvement and 1 showed no change. Schmitt et al. observed improvements in fatigue evaluated by the MFI [20]. Mijwel et al., who investigated combination of HIIT plus resistance training or aerobic training, observed no change in fatigue evaluated by the PFS [13]. Alizadeh AM et al. found that HIIT significantly reduced levels of interleukin (IL)-6 [18]. In summary, there is insufficient evidence regarding the effects of HIIT on HRQOL and fatigue. Further research should be conducted to determine the efficacy of HIIT for these outcomes in breast cancer survivors.

**Compliance rate and adverse events**

All 8 studies of HIIT interventions during treatment reported compliance rates, and those rates ranged from 57% to 97%. The compliance rate was 82.3% for HIIT alone, 80% to 97% for HIIT plus resistance training, and 57% to 75% for HIIT plus aerobic training. Six of the 8 studies during chemotherapy reported about adverse events and all 6 reported no adverse events, thus demonstrating that prescription of HIIT is extremely safe. Four of the 5 studies of HIIT interventions after treatment reported compliance rates, which ranged from 78.7% to 99%. Three of the 5 studies evaluated adverse events, and all 3 reported no adverse events, thus demonstrating that prescription of HIIT for breast cancer survivors is also safe.

**4.5 Perspective**
Efficacy of HIIT in cancer survivors

Past studies of HIIT interventions during and after breast cancer treatment conducted with common outcomes such as cardiorespiratory fitness, HRQOL, fatigue, and related biomarkers. The effects of HIIT on cardiorespiratory fitness were confirmed and comparable between interventions conducted during treatment (significant increase in 1 study, amelioration of treatment-related reduction in 2 studies) and after treatment (significant increase in 2 studies, no change in 1 study). HIIT compliance rates and incidence of adverse events also showed similar trends between interventions conducted during and after treatment, thus demonstrating the promising efficacy of HIIT. However, few studies examined muscle strength and mass or changes in cardiotoxicity or cardiovascular function after HIIT intervention in survivors. Therefore, further research on these outcomes is necessary.

Possibilities for home-based HIIT

A wide variety of basic and applied research has investigated HIIT in the general population. Given that HIIT is already known to improve cardiorespiratory fitness, more recent studies have investigated the feasibility of HIIT programs without specialized equipment or supervision. Blackwell et al. compared the effects of unsupervised bodyweight HIIT (home HIIT) and supervised HIIT using a treadmill (lab HIIT) on VO\(_2\)max. They found that both lab HIIT (pre 26.50 ± 6.31, post 31.00 ± 6.69 mL/kg/min, p < 0.001) and home HIIT (pre 27.77 ± 4.75, post 29.98 ± 6.09 mL/kg/min, p < 0.05) significantly improved VO\(_2\)max, but lab HIIT produced a significantly greater increase than home HIIT (p < 0.05) [24]. In contrast, Menz et al. found that home HIIT (pre 49.5 ± 6.6, post 54.4 ± 5.3 mL/kg/min, p < 0.001) produced comparable improvement in VO\(_2\)max to lab HIIT (pre 47.8 ± 5.6, post 54.1 ± 5.6 mL/kg/min, p < 0.001) [36]. A systematic review of bodyweight HIIT methodology has also been conducted [37]. The findings of these studies suggest that bodyweight HIIT is beneficial for increasing cardiorespiratory fitness, and a home-based bodyweight HIIT program should be developed for breast cancer survivors.

5. Conclusions

The majority of studies on HIIT for breast cancer survivors used lab-based, supervised interventions. HIIT is a time-efficient method for increasing cardiorespiratory fitness in breast cancer survivors, but further research is necessary to determine its effects on other outcomes such as HRQOL, fatigue, muscle function, and cardiovascular function because few studies have evaluated those outcomes. Due to the lack of evidence of benefit from home-based HIIT for breast cancer survivors, additional studies should be conducted to confirm the effects of such programs.

Declarations

-Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

-Consent for publication

Not applicable
-Availability of data and material

Not applicable

-Competing interests

The authors declare that EO and KT have no conflicts of interest associated with this manuscript. Dr. Matsuoka has received speaker fees from Suntory, Pfizer, Mochida, Eli Lilly, and NTT Data, is conducting collaborative research with SUSMED, and has received a grant from SENSIN Medical Research Foundation.

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-Authors' contributions

KT and EO were responsible for writing the manuscript. KT, YM and EO were involved in the design of the research and acquisition of the data. All authors contributed to analysis and interpretation of the data. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the manuscript, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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