

Acupuncture Can Reduce Side Effects of Cancer Treatments

Millions of patients undergo chemotherapy as part of their cancer treatment. Though controversial, chemotherapy uses very powerful drugs in an attempt to kill cancer cells. Although this may control some types of cancers and possibly prolong the lives of some patients, chemotherapy has many negative side effects. Among these are nausea and vomiting, loss of appetite, fatigue, anemia, body ache, headache, night sweats, stomach cramps and diarrhea. This has caused many patients to refuse this marginally effective and life-debilitating treatment. For those who still believe chemotherapy is worth pursuing, acupuncture can provide some relief in controlling the many undesirable side effects of chemotherapy.

Women undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer, for example, have found that acupuncture can be effective in managing such common side effects as hot flashes, night sweats, and excessive sweating. **Compared to conventional drug therapy, acupuncture produces no side effects, according to a study presented in 2008 at the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology's 50th Annual Meeting in Boston.**

Regrettably, a majority of women suffer from hot flashes after being treated with chemotherapy and/or anti-estrogen hormones, such as Tamoxifen and Arimidex. Hormone replacement therapy is often used to relieve hot flashes, but breast cancer patients can't avail themselves of this therapy due to an increased risk of a cancer's return. This leaves many women with the unpleasant alternative of being treated with steroids and/or antidepressant drugs. Unfortunately, these drugs have undesirable side effects, such as nausea, weight gain, constipation and fatigue. One of the most common drugs used to treat hot flashes, an antidepressant known as venlafaxine (Effexor), is plagued with side effects—including decreased libido, insomnia, dizziness and nausea.

A randomized clinical trial compared acupuncture to venlafaxine for 12 weeks to determine which was more effective in reducing night sweats, hot flashes, and sweating in breast cancer patients receiving hormonal therapy. The study involved 47 patients who received either Tamoxifen or Arimidex and suffered from at least 14 hot flashes per week. The Results were quite promising and showed that acupuncture reduced hot flashes as effectively as venlafaxine, with no side effects.

Acupuncture also offers a number of positive benefits, including an increased sense of well-being, more energy, and in some cases, a stronger sex drive. **Breast cancer survivors enjoy these benefits with a drug-free therapy that has no side effects.** What's more, these benefits last longer than many drugs commonly used to treat night sweats.

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For other types of cancer care in which chemotherapy or radiation is received, acupuncture can be extremely beneficial as a way to deal with uncomfortable side effects such as nausea, poor appetite and digestive problems, fatigue, insomnia and lowered immune function. It is also an excellent form of self-care to cope with anxiety, depression, stress and other difficult emotions, helping to lift and calm the spirit.