

The Role of Acupuncture in Cancer Treatment and Recovery

Acupuncture has been invaluable to my healing during my six-year struggle with metastatic breast cancer. My acupuncture treatments are like a shot in the arm of energy. The pleasant and unexpected result of acupuncture is that the treatments have consistently made me feel calmer and more centered emotionally. Also, I have received tremendous relief from my hot flashes, nausea, and fatigue. These wonderful benefits have helped me deal with the huge demands of combating a life threatening disease. (Sue.)

The extensive media coverage in the past few years has sparked new interest in this 3000-year-old medicine. Over 60 percent of the world's population currently uses acupuncture as a primary form of medicine. Acupuncture can be extremely important in helping cancer patients to deal more effectively with both the illness and the treatments. This fact sheet, designed for cancer patients and survivors, explains some of the key benefits of acupuncture.

Nausea and vomiting: Many chemotherapy patients experience nausea and vomiting, an unpleasant and exhausting side effect of cancer-fighting drugs. In 1997, the National Institutes of Health convened a panel of medical researchers to examine the effectiveness of acupuncture. The panel found that acupuncture can play a key role in helping to reduce or eliminate chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. Acupuncture patients often find that they do not need to take anti-nausea medications which can be associated with unwanted side effects.

Excessive body heat and hot flashes: Acupuncture treatments are designed to balance the body's internal systems, including the body's temperature regulation system. The basic principals of Yin and Yang correspond, in part, with the amount of heat and/or cold in the body. Treating hot flashes and excessive body heat are simple procedures that can make a profound difference in one's daily comfort. With relief from or reduction of night sweats, patients often find that they experience deeper and more restful sleep.

Revitalizing the energy of the body: A central aim of acupuncture is to reinvigorate and balance the life energy of the body. This energy is called Qi (pronounced "chee"). While chemotherapy and radiation kill cancer cells, they also can dampen and block the movement of Qi energy. Cancer patients who receive acupuncture treatment often experience increased energy levels and renewed strength to continue the healing process.

Cleanse the body of potent chemicals: Auricular acupuncture (acupuncture in the ears) can be a powerful tool to help the body detoxify from the heavy drugs used to treat cancer. Auricular treatments are an internationally-recognized, non-invasive, and effective method proven to help substance abusers stop drug use without severe physiological side effects. In a similar way, auricular acupuncture helps the body effectively process cancer-fighting drugs without interfering with the cancer treatment itself.

Improved sensory functioning and renewed production of saliva glands: Cancer treatments often affect the sensory organs. Research demonstrates that acupuncture can renew one's sense of taste and smell. In addition, many patients that have cancer of the mouth, throat, or jaw area lose the proper ability to produce saliva (a condition called xerostomia). Acupuncture often helps patients regain some or all of the use of saliva glands.

Relief from anxiety, depression, fatigue, insomnia and stress: While acupuncture can be extremely helpful in addressing many physiological concerns associated with cancer and cancer treatment, it can also help a person cope with the tremendous emotional and psychological challenges as well. Acupuncture treats the body, but it also supports the mind, emotions, and spirit. Acupuncture patients often report a greater sense of well-being and improved self-confidence in their ability to cope with the disease.

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