

Acupuncture and Breast Cancer

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Acupuncture has been shown to be effective in the treatment of some of the symptoms of breast cancer, as well as other types of cancer. Acupuncture can also relieve the side effects of cancer treatment, including fatigue, hot flashes, pain, nausea, and vomiting, as well as supporting the immune system.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the use of acupuncture in cancer treatment. The most thorough study of acupuncture in breast cancer patients was published in Journal of the American Medical Association in 2000. In the study, 104 women undergoing high-dose chemotherapy were given traditional anti-nausea medication. In addition to taking the medication, the women were randomly chosen to receive 5 days of electroacupuncture (acupuncture in which needles are stimulated with a mild electrical current), acupuncture without an electrical current, or no acupuncture. The women who had acupuncture had significantly fewer nausea episodes than those who did not receive the acupuncture treatment.

Another study, completed at Duke University and published in 2002, compared the use of acupuncture to the use of Zofran, an anti-nausea medication, before breast cancer surgery to reduce the nausea that can occur after surgery. The acupuncture treatment was found to work better than Zofran at controlling nausea.

In a French study published in 2003, acupuncture was examined in the treatment of cancer-related pain. Patients treated with acupuncture had a 36% reduction in pain after 2 months of acupuncture treatments, compared with a 2% reduction in pain in the patients receiving a placebo type of acupuncture.

In one very preliminary 2004 study at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, acupuncture was shown to reduce post-chemotherapy fatigue by 31% in people with various types of cancer. In 2005, another preliminary study of breast cancer patients in Sweden showed that acupuncture reduced hot flashes by half.

In addition to reducing the side effects of cancer treatment, acupuncture also has a profound effect on the body's immune function. At least seven studies



have evaluated the effect of acupuncture on immune system function in patients with cancer. Four randomized controlled trials, one non-randomized clinical study and two case series found that acupuncture enhanced or regulated immune function. The studies showed that acupuncture treatment enhanced the platelet count and prevented the leukocyte decrease that often occurs after radiation or chemotherapy. One study observed the effect of acupuncture on interleukin-2 (IL-2) and natural killer (NK) cell activity in the blood of patients with malignant tumors. The data showed that the IL-2 level and NK cell activity were significantly increased in the acupuncture group, compared with the control group.

In a clinical case series, 28 cancer patients who were treated with electroacupuncture while undergoing chemotherapy experienced no decline in T cells (CD3+, CD4+, CD8+) or in NK cell activity, both of which are usually suppressed by chemotherapy.

Seven clinical studies of acupuncture as a treatment for cancer-related pain have been reported. In a case series involving 183 cancer patients who were treated with acupuncture for cancer-related pain, 52% were significantly helped. Multiple treatments at intervals of 1 to 4 weeks were nearly always necessary for significant and long-term pain control.

In another case series, 29 patients with malignant tumors who developed pain received electroacupuncture treatment. All experienced various degrees of pain relief, and 25 out of 29 were able to either reduce or eliminate their analgesic requirements following multiple electroacupuncture treatments.

A study of breast cancer patients showed a strong correlation between the amount of chronic stress a person has and a decreased ability of Natural Killer (NK) cells, a key component of the immune system, to destroy cancer cells. This study also showed that a high level of chronic stress resulted in poor response to the normal medical treatment aimed at improving NK cell activity.

Individuals without chronic stress readily rebounded from the acute stress episodes with no long-term impact on NK-cell activity. This study demonstrates chronic stress can measurably reduce the ability of the immune system to respond to an acute stress event.

Acupuncture can effectively increase a cancer patient's quality of life by reducing pain, reducing nausea and vomiting, and enhancing the immune system. It can also be extremely effective in reducing chronic stress that has been shown to negatively affect the immune system.

Acupuncture & Natural Health Solutions offers cancer support and emotional support. Acupuncture can be safely used as a complement to conventional cancer treatments.

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