

Acupuncture & Cancer Care



Cancer is the leading cause of death in worldwide. there are 7.6 million deaths each year (approximately 13% of all deaths in 2008). Cancer survivors experience a wide range of symptoms during and following the completion of treatment, and some of these symptoms may persist for years or even decades. Due to the effectiveness, during the last two decades, the use of Complementary and Alternative medicine (CAM), including acupuncture, as an adjunctive therapy for cancer-related symptoms and for improving a patient's quality of life has increased significantly.

Understanding common treatments and their side effects

Cancer is an overall term for a group of diseases that occur when cells begin to reproduce abnormally, eventually damaging or killing healthy tissue. Most cancers are named according to where they begin in the body, and there are more than 100 different types. The most common are breast cancer, skin cancer, lung cancer, colon cancer, and prostate cancer. Your treatment plan will be based on many factors, including the type and stage (how far it has spread) of the cancer and your overall health. While cancer treatments have proven to be effective, they do have serious side effects to take into account. The most common treatments include:

Surgery: Performed to remove the cancer if possible. Surgery may be used alone or along with radiation

therapy, chemotherapy, or biological therapy.

Chemotherapy: The use of medications to destroy cancer cells. Chemotherapy generally lasts from 3 to 9 months, and can have side effects including fatigue, nausea, vomiting, hair loss, early menopause, and hot flashes.

Radiation therapy: The use of high doses of radiation to destroy cancer cells. Side effects generally include fatigue, hair loss, and skin darkening at the site of the treatment.

Biological therapy: This treatment works by boosting the body's immune system to fight cancer cells. Side effects depend on the specific type of therapy, but they can include rashes or swelling, flu-like symptoms, fatigue, nausea, and loss of appetite.

It's very important for you to realize that you have other options in addition to standard medical therapies. That's Traditional Chinese Medicine.

How acupuncture and TCM can help

Acupuncture and TCM have been used for thousands of years to maintain health and relieve symptoms. and become a popular complementary treatment in oncology, particularly as patients seek non-pharmacological alternatives to provide symptom control.

Since acupuncture has few side effects, it can be safely used as a complement to conventional cancer treatments. In fact, in many cancer cases it's recommended as a way to smooth and reduce side effects. According to the National Institutes of Health, acupuncture has been found to be effective in relieving: post-surgical pain, fatigue, nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy etc. In addition to acupuncture, your practitioner may also provide massage, acupressure, nutritional counseling, herbal medicines or vitamin supplements or an exercise program designed to help you stay as healthy as possible. Remember to always communicate with your health care providers about these and any other medications you take in order to avoid any drug interactions.

Cancer treatment according to Traditional Chinese Medicine is based on Fu Zheng Gu Ben principles. Fu Zhen means strengthening what is correct. It is an immune enhancing herbal regimen using specific

herbs. The objective is to support and stimulate deep energy systems within the body to make it stronger and more resistant to degeneration. Gu Ben refers to strengthening and supporting the body to regenerate and repair. Treatments may include:

- removing toxins that may contribute to cancer
- increasing the flow of blood and Qi
- removing accumulations of tissue that are believed to be the tumor
- restoring self-regulation and balance among the Jing, Qi and Shen.

Treating the person, not just the disease

Acupuncturist take a holistic, or whole-body, approach to cancer care. This means that not only will your symptoms be considered, but also your lifestyle, emotional state, and overall health. Your whole being will be taken into account, not just the cancer. When you work with your practitioner to improve your health and relieve your side effects, you are not only helping yourself to get the most from conventional treatments, you're taking back the control of your own life.

What physical effects acupuncture may have when used in cancer patients?

Acupuncture may cause physical responses in nerve cells, the pituitary gland, and parts of the brain. These responses can cause the body to release proteins, hormones, and brain chemicals that control a number of body functions. It is proposed that, in this way, acupuncture affects blood pressure and body temperature, boosts immune system activity, and causes the body's natural painkillers, such as endorphins, to be released.

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