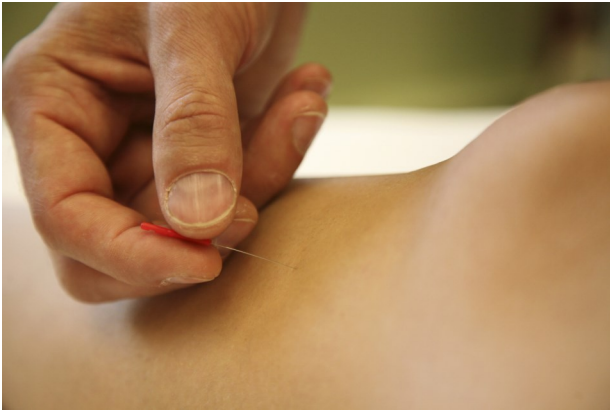


Patient Resource: Acupuncture



What is acupuncture?

The insertion of fine needles into the surface of the skin at specific points on the body.

What is it used for?

To improve symptoms associated with cancer and cancer treatment including:

- Pain
- Chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting
- Sleep disturbances
- Fatigue
- Anxiety and depression
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Hot flashes (due to breast and prostate cancer treatment)
- Radiation-induced xerostomia/dry mouth (due to head and neck cancer treatment)

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture is a 5,000 year old natural healing science with Eastern origins based on the premise that there are patterns of energy that flow through the body via channels, or 'meridians', that connect the body's organs and systems. Blockage of these channels can lead to illness, and acupuncture acts to remove blockage, increase energy flow and improve health.

Western scientists attribute acupuncture's effectiveness to triggering the release of specific, naturally occurring brain chemicals called endorphins, as well as initiating and optimizing the body's natural immune response.

Does acupuncture work?

Several large reviews of published studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of acupuncture for many cancer and cancer treatment related symptoms. In particular, substantial evidence supports the use of acupuncture in managing uncontrolled pain and chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. Most pain-related studies demonstrate increased pain relief with the addition of acupuncture treatment to usual care, or at least a similar effect with acupuncture treatment and usual care. There are also studies that show a reduced need for drug therapy when acupuncture is used alongside usual care, which can lessen the potential for drug related side effects. Studies of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting consistently show fewer episodes of acute vomiting with acupuncture treatment, although no difference in nausea severity. The greatest benefit could result from combining acupuncture with standard drug therapy.

Evidence from randomized controlled trials (considered the gold standard for a clinical trial) shows that acupuncture treatment can lead to fewer and less severe hot flashes in people with breast and prostate cancer, a benefit that can last for up to 6 months. Smaller studies on patients with post-chemotherapy and radiation-induced fatigue have also shown that acupuncture can improve fatigue and related distress. There is also preliminary evidence suggesting that acupuncture can benefit individuals with chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy through a decrease in related symptoms (eg. pain, numbness, and tingling in fingers and toes), including those who have not responded to drug therapy. Moreover, in people with radiation-induced xerostomia (dry mouth), studies consistently show an improvement in salivary flow rate, reduction of mouth dryness and hoarseness, as well as improved taste with acupuncture treatment.

Disclaimer

The OICC has prepared this monograph, as part of a series of monograph development, to share results of a review of the research evidence related to common therapies and products used within cancer patient care. The following monograph is designed to provide evidence-based research and neither advocates for or against the use of a particular therapy. Every effort is made to ensure the information included in this monograph is accurate at the time it is published. Prior to using a new therapy or product, always consult a licensed health care provider. The information in this monograph should not be interpreted as medical advice nor should it replace the advice of a qualified health care provider.



Patient Resource: Acupuncture

What are the side effects of acupuncture?

When practiced by trained and licensed practitioners, acupuncture is considered safe, with minimal side effects. Common side effects include distress, fatigue, bleeding or bruising at the insertion site, needling pain and momentary increase in sweating or hot flashes.

Is acupuncture safe?

Caution should be exercised in patients who are taking the anti-coagulant warfarin or patients with a tendency to bruise or bleed spontaneously. Acupuncture is not advisable for patients with severe blood or bleeding disorders, patients who are at risk of endocarditis due to heart valve abnormality, and patients with severe clotting disorders. Please contact your healthcare provider to discuss whether you are a good candidate for acupuncture.

What is the recommended frequency and length of treatment?

The frequency and length of acupuncture treatments vary by individual, depending on symptom severity and desired outcomes. Typically, patients will attend 30-60 minute appointments once or twice per week for up to 6 weeks, or until symptoms begin to resolve. Fewer and less frequent treatments are required during a maintenance phase.

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