

Acupuncture a Powerful Complementary Therapy for Cancer Patients

The 21st Century has been accompanied by great strides in cancer treatment for patients of many different malignancies. Among the many reasons for this progress is the growing popularity of what is known as “integrative” oncology. Integrative oncology is a more comprehensive cancer treatment model that utilizes not only traditional therapies like surgery and chemotherapy, but also alternative therapies to enhance the effectiveness of traditional treatments. One of the more popular therapies used in conjunction with traditional treatments is acupuncture.

Acupuncture, originating in the Far East, has long been known for its relaxation and pain-relief benefits, but was not fully implemented or recommended within cancer treatment regimens until more recently.

How Does Acupuncture Benefit Cancer Patients?

One must understand the principles integrative oncology to appreciate how acupuncture’s benefit to those undergoing cancer treatment. Alternative therapies, like acupuncture, are not designed to fight the cancer as a sole method of treatment. Rather, these therapies are used in conjunction with traditional treatments in an effort to lessen uncomfortable symptoms of traditional treatments like those brought on by chemotherapy and radiation. Symptoms of the cancer itself often pale in comparison to the extreme symptoms brought on by toxic chemotherapy regimens. The success and effectiveness of these traditional therapies often depend on the patient being able to endure these symptoms, making any treatment which can reduce these symptoms extremely valuable in the bigger picture.

Acupuncture has been proven effective in conjunction with traditional therapies because it has the ability to reduce symptoms onset by traditional therapies. Weight loss, fatigue, pain, nausea, and general illness are common in patients undergoing treatment for many different cancers are predominantly the unfortunate side effects of traditional cancer treatments. Acupuncture has, to varying degrees, been shown to alleviate each of these symptoms in patients undergoing treatment, thereby increasing the effectiveness of these treatments as patients are able to endure symptoms and maintain health throughout the high doses of chemotherapy and radiation necessary to reduce the cancer volume in the body.

Mesothelioma is a rare cancer known only to be caused by exposure to asbestos. Patients of [mesothelioma](#) are often precluded from surgical resection as a curative therapy and therefore rely heavily upon chemotherapy and radiation to reduce tumor mass. Acupuncture has been shown to be an extremely valuable therapy for mesothelioma patients, reducing the symptoms of these traditional therapies which require extremely high-toxicity doses of both radiation and different [mesothelioma chemotherapy](#) agents to fight the aggressive cancer.

Acupuncture has been shown so effective in integrative oncology treatment regimens that both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the National Institute of Health (NIH) have formally recognized the value of complementary acupuncture in comprehensive cancer treatment programs.

While certainly acupuncture could benefit many cancer patients, it may not be appropriate for all those undergoing cancer treatment. Specifically, those with a history of endocarditis, thrombocytopenia, or neutropenia should avoid acupuncture. Patients who use an existing pacemaker or those with lymphedema should consult with their oncologist before commencing any acupuncture regimen or other complementary therapy.

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Sources

The National Cancer Institute: *A Pilot Study of Cancer-Related Fatigue*

The National Institute of Health: *Acupuncture Within Integrative Oncology Methodology*

World Health Organization: *Acupuncture Research in Cancer Treatment*