

# Acupuncture may control vomiting after chemo

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Acupuncture, in conjunction with the latest drugs to prevent nausea and vomiting, seems to help relieve chemotherapy-induced vomiting, a new report suggests.

Despite the advent of new drug that control nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy (anti-emetics), many cancer patients still experience these unpleasant side effects, which can impair quality of life, cause emotional distress, and aggravate cancer-related symptoms such as weight loss, lethargy and weakness.

The ancient Chinese technique of acupuncture, used to treat a variety of ailments by stimulating specific points on the body, has become increasingly popular for chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, based on what the National Institutes of Health recently called "promising" research.

The current findings are based on pooled data from up to 11 trials that looked at the impact of acupuncture-point stimulation on chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in more than 1,200 cancer patients.

The studies looked at several different types of acupuncture, including electroacupuncture, in which a small electrical current is passed through very thin needles that penetrate the skin; noninvasive electrostimulation of the skin surface using a wristwatch-like device; manual acupuncture -- the most well-known type that involves insertion and manual rotation of very fine needles; or acupressure, which involves pressing on the points usually with fingertips.

According to investigators, 22 percent of patients who underwent acupuncture experienced vomiting the first day after chemotherapy compared with 31 percent of those who did not undergo acupuncture.

Co-author of the report, Jeanette M. Ezzo, of James P. Swyers Enterprises, a Baltimore-based company that develops complementary and alternative medicines, and associates also found that electroacupuncture reduces first-day vomiting, whereas noninvasive electrostimulation of the skin surface does not.

Manual acupuncture also appears to be largely ineffective for chemotherapy-induced nausea or vomiting.

Acupressure, the team found, reduces first-day nausea, but is not effective for "delayed" symptoms of nausea or vomiting.

In all of the trials included in the analysis, patients received concomitant anti-emetics, and all patients, except those in the electroacupuncture trials, received "state-of-the-art" drugs such as Zofran and Anzemet, which are currently recommended for chemotherapy-related nausea and vomiting.

Therefore, it's not known if electroacupuncture adds anything to the most current anti-emetic drugs. This is an important unknown that needs to be studied, note the investigators.

This review, published in the current issue of The Cochrane Library, complements data on post-operative nausea and vomiting suggesting that acupuncture has a biologic effect, Ezzo and colleagues conclude.

SOURCE: The Cochrane Library 2006.