# What Acupuncture Can Do

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What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture uses very fine needles that are sterilized and inserted into specific points on the body. This elicits effects such as improved circulation, which in turn enhances the flow of oxygen and nutrients throughout the body. It can improve organ function and stimulate the nervous system to release natural painkillers and mood modulators.

How is acupuncture related to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)?

Acupuncture is part of TCM, a 3,000-year-old practice that also includes herbal therapy; manual therapies, such as cupping and massage; exercise; and dietary therapy. It doesn't have specialties, such as oncology or cardiology. Instead, a TCM doctor treats the person as a single complex system.

While it is based on the concept of chi, or life energy, I don't discuss chi with my patients. I talk about biological effects. TCM is practical medicine.

Can Chinese and Western medicine work together?

Yes. It's not one or the other. Each has limitations. Working with oncologists, acupuncturists help maintain patient quality of life before, during and after treatment.

We can't treat everything, and we aren't successful with everybody. But TCM has a positive impact on many cancer patients.

We see the person as a whole. Western doctors often focus just on cancer and not other issues a patient has. One of the biggest contributions I make is helping keep your health optimal so you can continue cancer treatment.

Which side effects is acupuncture most effective in treating?

There is good evidence that acupuncture helps alleviate painful chemotherapy-related neuropathies. It quells nausea and vomiting, as well as diarrhea or constipation, due to radiation and chemotherapy. If radiation has caused dry mouth, acupuncture helps by stimulating the

salivary glands.

Breast cancer patients can get relief from lymphedema, the swelling and pain caused by lymph node removal; acupuncture stimulates circulation to the area. Acupuncture can also improve recovery after surgery, reduce hot flashes due to hormone therapy, ease fatigue and reduce stress, anxiety and insomnia.

Studies have shown acupuncture to be safe; in rare cases, there can be slight bruising at the needle insertion site.

What is the most inspiring part of your work?

I am part of improving quality of life, especially for survivors. During treatment, you will have a community around for support. But afterward, most of this goes away, and you are left on your own. I can guide you on how to stay in control of your health.

I say I am the luckiest doctor at the cancer center because I am the only person the patients like to see, and they leave feeling relaxed and smiling.

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