



CLINICAL CARE

Cancer Survivors Need Acupuncture to Fight Their Next Battle

Editorial Staff

Musculoskeletal pain is common among cancer survivors and has the tendency to become chronic, particularly because acute pain is ignored or inadequately treated in favor of cancer care. In fact, often the pain begins during or even before a cancer diagnosis is made and doesn't go away, even when the cancer does.

Just imagine surviving cancer - and then having to deal with ongoing pain. What's the solution? Acupuncture, suggests research.

Presented at the 2020 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology and reported in *Clinical Oncology News*, the study included 360 adult cancer survivors with no evidence of disease, but suffering from chronic musculoskeletal pain (defined in the study as active pain lasting at least three months and self-rated four or higher in the past week on a 0-10 pain scale). All patients had completed cancer treatment at least one month prior to beginning the study, and had experienced chronic pain for a significant time period: more than five years, on average.



Approximately half of the patients in the study cohort were breast cancer survivors, with lymphoma and prostate cancer survivors each representing 10-15 percent of patients (lymphoma: 11 percent; prostate cancer: 14 percent). Twelve percent of patients had a history of suffering (and surviving) more than one type of cancer.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three comparison groups: electroacupuncture, auricular (battlefield) acupuncture or usual care, with members of the first two groups receiving weekly treatment for 10 weeks.

Both acupuncture groups reduced pain more than usual care, assessed at week 12 via the Brief Pain Inventory; with electroacupuncture more effective than battlefield acupuncture. A secondary outcome measure, mental and physical quality of life, also improved more in the acupuncture groups compared to usual care, assessed via the PROMIS-10 Global Health score. Only mild adverse events were reported in both groups.

Editor's Note: In our January 2020 issue, we reported on another study with applications to cancer patients, whether actively battling the disease or (in the case of this study) dealing with chronic pain even after surviving it. To learn more, read "Taking the Pain Out of Cancer With Acupuncture," which summarizes findings from a systematic review and meta-analysis published in *JAMA Oncology*.

DECEMBER 2020