

PROSTATE CANCER

Acupuncture can alleviate hot flashes in prostate cancer patients

Acupuncture can provide relief from hot flashes associated with prostate cancer treatment, according to two recent studies.

Hot flashes are an unwanted side effect in up to 80% of men treated with androgen ablation therapy, with associated negative impact on quality of life. “As hormonal therapy is used more extensively in the treatment of prostate cancer, it is ever more important that we pay attention to quality of life and work to minimize the adverse effects of therapy”, says Tomasz Beer, from the Oregon Health and Science University, Portland, OR. “In addition to causing discomfort, hot flashes can interrupt sleep and contribute to the fatigue that men experience during hormonal therapy.”

For a study published in *Urology*, Beer and colleagues investigated the effect of acupuncture with electrostimulation on hot flash score—a measure of hot flash frequency and intensity—in a cohort of 22 men receiving androgen ablation therapy whose score was >4. Hot-flash-related

quality of life and sleep quality were also assessed.

After the first 4 weeks of biweekly sessions, 41% of patients reported a reduction in hot flash score of >50%; 55% of participants reached this end point during the subsequent 6 weekly sessions. This was associated with an improvement in sleep quality and quality of life.

For a second study, published in the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology, Biology, Physics*, 14 patients attended biweekly acupuncture sessions for 4 weeks. They noticed a 68% improvement in hot flash score 2 weeks into the regimen, which increased to 89% at 6 weeks. Interestingly, at 8 months after the end of treatment, the mean improvement was maintained at 80%, suggesting that acupuncture may provide a long-term benefit.

Neither team identified a mechanism of action for this benefit, and this remains an area which requires further study. In addition, Beer points out that his group’s



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investigation was not randomized, and that the placebo effect has been shown in previous studies of acupuncture to account for around a 25% improvement in symptoms. Nevertheless, it seems that acupuncture could prove to be a useful nonpharmacological treatment for androgen-ablation-associated hot flashes in prostate cancer patients.

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Original articles Beer, T. *et al.* Acupuncture for hot flashes in patients with prostate cancer. *Urology* doi:10.1016/j.urology.2010.03.033 | Ashamalla, J. *et al.* Acupuncture for the alleviation of hot flashes in men treated with androgen ablation therapy. *Int. J. Radiat. Oncol. Biol. Phys.* doi:10.1016/j.ijrobp.2010.01.025