

Acupressure shows promise in relieving fatigue in cancer survivors

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As thousands of breast cancer survivors battle persistent fatigue, a Michigan State University nursing researcher is studying whether acupressure – a technique where physical pressure is applied to acupuncture points by the hand, elbow or various devices – can help alleviate symptoms.

Gwen Wyatt will study 300 [breast cancer](#) survivors to examine the effects of two acupressure treatments on persistent cancer-related fatigue, a state of being tired or weary that affects up to 82 percent of survivors within the first five years of diagnosis.

"There are more than two million breast cancer survivors today, and persistent cancer-related fatigue is one of the most common and distressing symptoms," said Wyatt, a professor with the College of Nursing. "It is associated with decreased quality of life, poor sleep quality and depression."

With acupressure – derived from acupuncture, a component of traditional Chinese medicine – pressure is applied to acupuncture points on the body to treat disease. Wyatt said pilot research has shown self-administered acupressure can significantly decrease fatigue by as much as 70 percent in cancer survivors, as well as improve sleep quality.

As part of the study, the breast cancer survivors (all at least 12 months after completion of cancer treatments and suffering from persistent fatigue) will be randomly divided into three groups receiving relaxation

acupressure, stimulating acupressure or routine standard care for six weeks.

In addition to measuring the impacts of the treatments on cancer-related fatigue, Wyatt and her team will examine the effects on sleep quality.

"There are few treatment options for persistent cancer-related fatigue, and these costly treatments often require a trained practitioner or have unacceptable side effects," Wyatt said. "On the other hand, self-administered [acupressure](#) is nontoxic, inexpensive and requires minimal instruction. It appears to be a promising treatment for persistent fatigue."

The study, part of a subcontract via the University of Michigan, is being funded by the National Cancer Institute. Wyatt is working with Suzanna Zick and Richard Harris from U-M's departments of Anesthesiology and Family Medicine on the overall project.

Wyatt has researched multiple complementary and alternative medicines for women recovering from breast cancer in hopes of creating a viable treatment intervention. Recent research published by Wyatt in the journal *Nursing Research* found 57 percent of women are using such therapies, and the sicker a woman is the more likely she is to use multiple therapies.

"Improving quality of life is a research priority at the College of Nursing," she said. "If a patient has to live with breast cancer, then the health care community needs to ensure that patient has the highest quality of life possible during treatment and aftercare."

Provided by Michigan State University

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