Medical Xpress

Electro-acupuncture for disrupted sleep in women with breast cancer

November 28 2016

It's somewhat of a little-known adverse effect of having breast cancer, but studies suggest that approximately 30% to 40% of women with breast cancer report persistent hot flashes. Nocturnal hot flashes are among the most problematic because they can contribute to poor sleep.

A new study shows that electro-acupuncture may be effective in providing some relief. The study is being published online in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

Compared with women who undergo natural menopause, women with breast cancer are at a greater risk of experiencing hot flashes, partially as a result of the premature menopause that results from chemotherapy and surgery, as well as estrogen deficiency caused by the use of breast cancer treatments such as tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors. It is estimated that by the year 2020 there will be nearly six million breast cancer survivors in the United States.

Researchers analyzed data from a randomized, controlled trial involving 58 breast cancer survivors experiencing bothersome hot flashes. They compared the benefits of using electro-acupuncture (the application of a pulsating electric current) to prescribing gabapentin, an anti-seizure medication frequently prescribed to treat sleep disturbances related to hot flashes. The study showed electro-acupuncture to be comparable to, if not better than, gabapentin in helping to reduce hot flash severity and frequency and improving overall sleep quality (including falling asleep faster and fewer sleep disruptions). Although it is not exactly understood

how acupuncture affects sleep, it has been shown to affect a number of neurotransmitters associated with sleep, such as serotonin and melatonin.

Poor sleep is particularly bothersome for breast cancer survivors experiencing nighttime hot flashes because it has been shown to increase levels of pain, fatigue, depression and anxiety. Although electro-acupuncture produced significant sleep improvements, researchers noted that sleep quality for the participants was still not as good as it should be, implying that more research is necessary to explore possible combinations of pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic treatments.

"This study shows that, for women who need or choose to avoid medications, electro-acupuncture may be an option because it has minimal risks, but blinded controlled trials are needed," says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

Citation: Electro-acupuncture for disrupted sleep in women with breast cancer (2016, November 28) retrieved 17 May 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-electro-acupuncture-disrupted-women-breast-cancer.html