

Chinese Medicine Support for Oncology Treatment

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) can be used as a supportive therapeutic modality throughout your fight against cancer. Acupuncture, herbal medicine and other forms of therapy within Chinese medicine can be used to treat and manage side effects from radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery.

Chinese medicine is a discipline of medicine that has been in use for thousands of years and includes the use of acupuncture, herbal medicine, moxibustion, cupping, and tuina (Chinese massage) to treat patients. The main principle of Chinese medicine is to maintain balance within the body in order to maintain health. When the body is not in balance, ill health occurs. The systems of meridians, organ function, Qi & blood, five elements and 8 guiding principles are used to determine the cause of the disease, and the course of treatment needed to restore health.

How can Chinese Medicine be of help to you?

TCM can be used to help support you and manage the side effects of your cancer treatment. It can help improve your well-being and ability to recover from oncology treatment. Areas where TCM is most commonly of use include:

- Fatigue/lack of energy
- Pain
- Nausea/vomiting
- Poor appetite
- Bowel problems
- Poor sleep
- Mouth ulcers
- Fluid retention
- Skin complaints

How often should I use TCM?

Your treatment will vary depending on the stage of oncology treatment you are at, how you are feeling, ability to get to appointments etc. When you are undergoing active treatment (radiotherapy, chemotherapy or surgery) acupuncture would be the most likely form of treatment and can occur up to 3-4 times a week. Otherwise weekly/fortnightly or monthly treatments are usual. You can discuss this with your practitioner and work out what is going to be the best treatment program for you. If you are taking herbs and don't require regular adjustment of your prescription, there can be longer intervals between consultations.

How do I find a practitioner?

If you don't know of a TCM practitioner, or have one recommended to you, look on the Chinese Medicine Registration Board website www.cmrbc.vic.gov.au . All TCM practitioners must be registered by the CMRB if they wish to practice in Victoria. Registered practitioners can be found on the website in the 'Practitioner Search' section.

Do I tell my oncologist I am using TCM?

Yes! It is important for your oncologist to know what efforts you are making to assist your treatment. There may be something your oncologist needs to make your TCM practitioner aware of that may affect your treatment. Ask your TCM practitioner to write to your oncologist about your TCM treatment if they are not already doing so.

What is it?

Acupuncture involves the insertion of superfine needles into the skin at specified acupoints along meridians. The points are chosen according to patterns identified through discussion during consultation. The needles are retained for approximately 20 minutes and as well as therapeutic effect, patients usually feel very relaxed after treatment. Laser acupuncture can be used for people who have needle phobias or are unable to have needles due to removal of lymph nodes etc.

Chinese herbal medicine uses Chinese herbs in prescriptions which can be patent or specifically constructed for the individual. Prescriptions can be adjusted according to changes in your treatment or health. Herbal medicine can come in the forms of raw herbs (which need to be boiled by the patient), powdered herbs (mixed with warm water) or herbal pills/tablets.

Moxibustion is the burning of the herb Ai Ye (Mugwort) either directly over areas of skin or in a roll on top of an acupuncture needle. It is used to help clear meridians to improve smooth flow of Qi and blood, dispel damp and impart warmth into the body.

Cupping uses glass, plastic or bamboo cups to create suction on an area of skin, usually an acupoint. Cupping follows the meridian theory and can be used to help remove stagnation, open meridians to enable free flow of Qi and improve meridian and organ function. It helps activate the lymphatic system, promote blood circulation and deep tissue repair.

Tuina is a form of Chinese manipulative therapy and massage. It often used in conjunction with acupuncture, cupping and/or moxibustion and stimulates acupuncture/pressure points. It is a strong form of massage and is quite invigorating.

If you have any queries or questions regarding the use of Chinese medicine, please do not hesitate to contact me on ginsc@hotmail.com , or 0409 417 046.