

Question: Are there natural ways to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy?

Answer: Vomiting and nausea are among the most common side effects of chemotherapy. Although there are standard medications which can significantly help to relieve these symptoms, some people may be looking for natural alternatives or natural adjunctive therapies. You have a number of choices.

First of all, you might want to try acupressure. A number of studies, including a Korean study (Effect of acupressure on nausea and vomiting during chemotherapy cycle for Korean postoperative stomach cancer patients; Shin YH, Kim TI, Shin MS, Juon HS; *Cancer Nursing*, July-August 2004) showed that pressure on a point approximately three finger widths up from the wrist joint on the palmar side of the arm significantly reduced nausea. At many pharmacies, you can get a fairly inexpensive elastic band with a plastic bead imbedded in it to place on your wrist to stimulate this point. I bought a pair of these for my father when he was going through chemotherapy, and they really seemed to help.

There are any number of Traditional Chinese formulas which address nausea, vomiting, and lack of appetite, which are symptoms frequently related to a "Spleen Qi Deficiency." However, these may be difficult to find if you do not already see a qualified practitioner. Easily available and palatable herbs are right at your local grocery store, though. Ginger has been used for many years to help settle the stomach, so many common herb teas with ginger in them can be helpful. If you want a stronger effect, you can slice a piece of fresh ginger into a cup and pour boiling water on it. Sweetened with just a little honey, this is a delicious drink which can help nausea. Even strong ginger candy can help an upset stomach. And of course, chamomile tea has also been reported to help ease digestive upsets. Spearmint may also be helpful, especially in the form of a tea. Too much cold raw food can cause some digestive problems with an already stressed system, so you may want to stay away from raw mint leaves. In fact, although some raw vegetables are ok, try to stick with lightly steamed vegetables. Don't eat or drink too much cold food. And – sorry to say this – especially stay away from ice cream. This is just too hard to digest.

Finally, you might want to consider Acupuncture. The National Institutes of Health Consensus Statement on Acupuncture recognized the efficacy of acupuncture on the treatment of nausea due to chemotherapy and other causes. In a small study of a variety of different types of cancer cases reported in *Shanxi Chinese Medicine*, a specific series of Acupuncture points was found to provide anywhere from some relief to complete relief of nausea and vomiting. The sooner Acupuncture was initiated following the beginning of chemotherapy, the more effective it was. Quite a number of other studies also support the use of Acupuncture points for the relief of nausea.