

# Electro Acupuncture Eases Pain After Breast Surgery

By Adam Marcus

**A** shocking twist on acupuncture may help women who undergo major breast surgery recover with less nausea and pain, a new research says.

Scientists say electrical stimulation that mimics needle pricks is more effective than the leading anti-nausea drug at controlling the lingering effects of anesthesia in women who undergo surgery for breast cancer, breast reduction or breast enlargement. They also say it eases postoperative pain.

The work was presented in New Orleans at a meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

Acupuncture, the age-old traditional Chinese remedy that uses needles to re-channel the body's life force (chi), can ease pain in patients with a variety of diseases. And the therapy

also works to soothe the nausea associated with surgery and virtually any other medical procedure or problem, from chemotherapy to morning sickness, says Dr. Kenneth Conklin, an anesthesiologist and cancer specialist at the University of California at Los Angeles. Indeed, the National Institutes of Health has endorsed the regimen for this purpose.

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and then points to a 1989 study in New York that did not rely on patient recall but used health records to establish a patient's past abortion history. The study found a 90 percent increase in risk of breast cancer in women who underwent abortions.

Both Newcomb of Washington University and Michels of Harvard say they found that older study lacking. "It looked only at very young women and did not eliminate confounders," Newcomb said, referring to factors such as a family history of breast cancer that may "affect or confuse" a study.

Michels is currently working on just such a study of 700,000 women and expects to have her results by fall of 2002. The study will look at comparable groups of women, such as those who had a child by age 25, and then break that group into those who had

an abortion and those who did not.

In the meantime, a new editorial published in *Lancet Oncology* by breast surgeon Tim Davidson argues that the current evidence is insufficient to justify a warning to patients considering an abortion—a view he says is endorsed by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

The *Lancet Oncology* editorial may bode well for the Mad River Women's clinic in Fargo and more research into breast cancer may ultimately improve prevention, detection and treatment.

Harvard's Michels says that the end point of all research should be the female patient.

"At the end of the day this is about a search for the truth, whatever

truth that is," she says.

Margaret Woodbury is a *WNews* correspondent and a freelance journalist based in New York.

For more information:  
National Cancer Institute - "Abortion and Breast Cancer." Website: [http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/3\\_53.htm](http://cis.nci.nih.gov/fact/3_53.htm)  
planned parenthood dot org - "Anti-choice Claims About Abortion and Breast Cancer." Website: [http://www.plannedparenthood.org/library/facts/fact\\_cancer\\_022800.html](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/library/facts/fact_cancer_022800.html)  
Concerned Women for America "Abortion Clinic on Trial." Website: [http://cwfa.org/library/life/2001-09-10\\_abc-link.shtml](http://cwfa.org/library/life/2001-09-10_abc-link.shtml)

Source: Women's Enews, 17 February 2002, Website: <http://www.womensenews.org>.

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Conklin, who helps teach the acupuncture course at the University of California (UCLA), offers the needle treatment to his cancer patients in addition to their drugs and radiation. He calls it "a tremendous benefit" for those who choose the therapy. Not only does the treatment ease their pain and nausea, it also helps them put on weight and feel more energetic—while avoiding the side effects of anti-nausea drugs.

In the new study, led by anesthesiologist Dr. Tong Joo Gan, Duke University researchers compared acupuncture with the antiemetic drug ondansetron (Zofran), in 40 women undergoing major breast surgery. The women were split into three groups: one that received acupuncture only, one that got ondansetron, and one that received placebo treatment.

### Electric Probes, Not Needles

The technique Gan and his colleagues used is called electro acupuncture, which relies on electric probes rather than needles and doesn't need to break the skin. The researchers placed electrodes at a region of the wrist known as the pericardial meridian, home to one of 14 acupuncture lines Chinese healers have mapped.

The electrodes, placed before and during surgery, deliver pulses of energy at two alternating frequencies, 15 hertz and 100 hertz, which creates a tingling and often warm sensation, Gan says. That feeling corresponds to

a healthful balance in chi, he adds.

Two hours after coming out of surgery, only 23 percent of women treated with acupuncture said they were nauseated, compared with 36 percent of those who took the drug and almost 70 percent of those who didn't get either therapy, the researchers say.

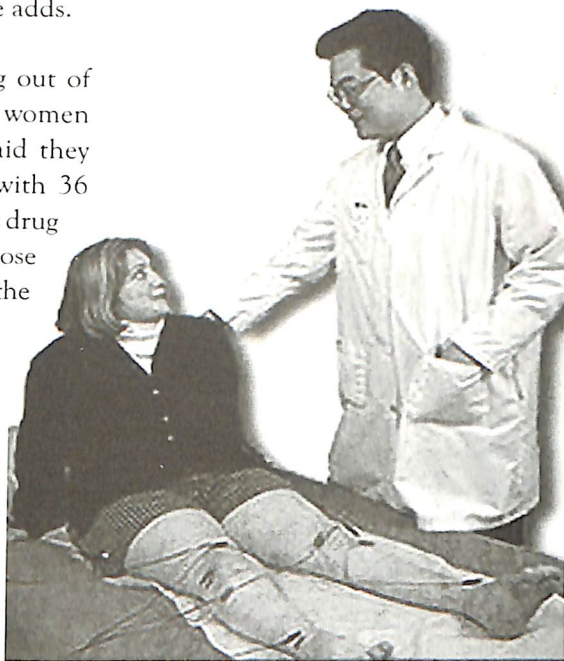
Nausea grew over the course of the day, but after 24 hours patients in the acupuncture group were still less likely to feel nauseated than those in either the drug or placebo group.

Women who received either acupuncture or ondansetron reported less vomiting than untreated patients, both early after surgery and 24 hours later.

Acupuncture also seemed to make a significant dent in moderate or severe postoperative pain, the researchers say, proving about twice as effective as either the drug or no treatment.

"The degree of nausea appears to be better," says Gan, and "the acupuncture group appears to have better control of pain compared to patients in the standard treatment arm."

Of course, there are some things for which acupuncture isn't useful. Fighting infection or treating cancer, for example, aren't appropriate chores for the therapy, says Dr. Peter Johnstone, a radiation oncologist and



<http://www.mdausa.org/publications/Quest/q2point.cfm>

acupuncturist at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego.

But in general, acupuncture is a good approach to dispelling symptoms of a wide range of ailments. "It won't fix a herniated disc, but it may ameliorate some of the pain," Johnstone says.

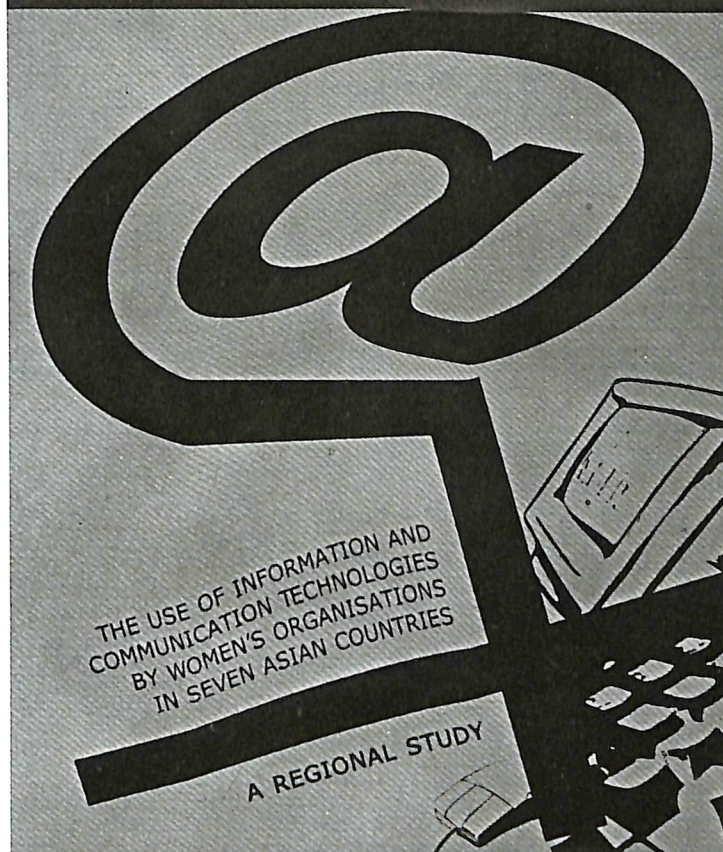
### Interested?

If you're interested in acupuncture, talk with your doctor. But don't be surprised if he isn't particularly encouraging, Conklin says. Many Western-trained physicians don't know much about Chinese medicine.

Source: HealthScoutNews, October 2001, Website: [http://kevxm12a.infospace.com/\\_1\\_300313\\_\\_info.sbug/health/hlt-story.htm&qid=502230&qt=4](http://kevxm12a.infospace.com/_1_300313__info.sbug/health/hlt-story.htm&qid=502230&qt=4)



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Asia is one of the fastest growing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) regions in the world. But the growth is uneven across the region and within the countries themselves. The growth of ICT is apparent in urban cities but the rural areas are neglected. If women's NGOs have access and connection in urban areas, does this automatically mean that their grassroots partners have the same access? What is the environment surrounding women's access and utilisation of ICTs? What kind of ICT training and networking will promote women's advancement?

These are some of the questions that the book NGO\_Women@asia.net attempts to address. Culled from a wider regional study on women's use of information and communication technologies (ICT) that was carried out by Isis International-Manila, Asian Women's' Resource Center (AWORC) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific (UNESCAP), the book assesses the extent to which women's groups use ICTs in seven countries- India, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, South Korea and the Philippines.

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