

No nausea is just the point

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NINE years ago Margaret Keenan underwent a double mastectomy to stop the spread of breast cancer. Afterwards, she was prescribed medication that made her so sick and nauseous that she stopped taking it within a week.

Her daughter suggested acupuncture to relieve the side effects. That was the best advice she received. "I started visiting acupuncturist Hoc Ku Huynh and after the first visit I knew I did the right thing. I stopped vomiting and stopped feeling nauseous. Hoc just fixed me up," Keenan says.

According to US research released last week acupuncture may actually work better than drugs in helping ease nausea in post-operative patients. Researchers at Duke University Medical Centre in North Carolina studied 75 women who'd had major breast surgery such as mastectomy or augmentation.

Two hours after surgery 77 per cent of the patients given acupuncture had no nausea or vomiting, compared to 64 per cent medicated and 42 per cent who received nothing.

Writing in the journal *Anesthesia and Analgesia*, Dr Tong Joo Gan says: "Patients in our randomised trial who received acupuncture enjoyed a more comfortable recovery from surgery than those who received an anti-sickness medication."

Keenan is now a firm believer in acupuncture and her husband, children and grandchildren are regular visitors at Huynh's centre in Sydney's Chinatown. Judy James, chief executive of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association, says acupuncture has always been used in traditional Chinese medicine to relieve nausea.

She says there is an increasing trend among women to try acupuncture when dealing with post-operative symptoms such as nausea. Acupuncture has also been found to relieve morning sickness.

Huynh agrees: "Nausea is related to the digestive system. Acupuncture helps to settle and redirect the stomach energy downwards, not upwards which results in vomiting or nausea." Trained in the University of Xiamen in China, Huynh has been practising acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine for 27 years, since migrating from Cambodia.

Brisbane acupuncturist Leanne Zaver treated Linda Armour for nausea after a gall bladder operation two years ago.

"Initially Linda was getting acupuncture for her chronic fatigue. After she had an operation she continued with the treatment to help relieve the nausea. When she became pregnant she continued with acupuncture to help relieve her morning sickness."

Armour still has acupuncture once a month "because I feel so good after the treatment. I feel that acupuncture helps to keep my energy levels up and my hormones balanced."