

## Additional information about managing menopause symptoms

- **Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA)** provides information on managing menopause symptoms. Free booklets can be downloaded from the website or ring 1800 500 258 to request a booklet.
  - Hormone Therapy and Breast Cancer
  - Menopause and Breast Cancer[www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au)
- **Cancer Australia** provide a booklet called Managing Menopausal symptoms after breast cancer - A guide for women.  
[www.canceraustralia.gov.au/resources](http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/resources)
- **Jean Hailes** is a not-for-profit organisation. A number of factsheets on menopause are available from the website.  
<https://jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause>
- **The Australasian Menopause Society (AMS)** produces useful patient information sheets about menopause.  
<http://www.menopause.org.au/>

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### About Calvary

Founded in 1885 by the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, Calvary is a charitable, not-for-profit, Catholic health care organisation. We're responsible for over 12,000 staff and volunteers, 15 Public and Private Hospitals, 15 Retirement and Aged Care Facilities and a national network of Community Care Centres.



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# Hot flushes and acupuncture



Calvary

Mater Newcastle

Continuing the Mission of the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary

Calvary Mater Newcastle is a public hospital within the Hunter New England Local Health District network.

## Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are a common menopausal symptom that may be accompanied by sweating, rapid heartbeat, and anxiety or nausea. When severe, they can interfere with daily activities and disturb sleep. They can also affect your mood and leave you feeling irritable and tired (*Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) Hormone Therapy and Breast Cancer booklet*).

Hot flashes can be caused by early menopause from surgical removal of ovaries or chemotherapy. Antiestrogen hormone treatment (also called endocrine therapy) can make hot flashes worse for some women. (*Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre*).

The lifestyle modifications summarised in the **BCNA Hormone Therapy and Breast Cancer** booklet are a good first approach to reduce hot flashes for many women (see back of pamphlet for how to obtain a copy).

There is evidence from studies that acupuncture may reduce hot flashes. A clinical trial showed combining acupuncture with advice on diet, exercise and psychological support resulted in 50-70% reduction in hot flashes. (*lesi et al.JCO 2016*)

## What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a component of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and involves the use

of needles, heat, pressure, or electricity to stimulate one or more points on the body to promote the flow of internal energy.

## Acupuncture practitioner requirements

If you want to try acupuncture, check that your practitioner has experience in treating hot flashes. In Australia practitioners are required to be registered with the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (APHRA).

Your private health insurance company may provide a rebate for acupuncture treatment. Such treatments do not require a medical doctor's referral.

## Benefits of acupuncture

Some studies suggest acupuncture may assist to improve quality of life by decreasing hot flashes and assisting anxiety and depression.

## Important things to consider before trying acupuncture

Possible side effects and complications which should be explained by the acupuncturist are listed below. Speak to your doctors if unsure.

- **Soreness**
- **Infection risk** if you have low white blood cell counts
- **Risk of bleeding** if you have low platelet count (blood clotting cells) or are on blood thinners you should avoid acupuncture

- **Lymphoedema** - anyone who has had lymph nodes removed from under the arm should not have needles inserted into that arm (*BreastCancer.org May 2015*)
- **Avoid Electrical Stimulation Acupuncture** if you wear a pacemaker (*Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre*)

## Other options to minimise hot flashes

Feeling overwhelmed and anxious may trigger hot flashes. Yoga, meditation, Tai-Chi and other relaxation techniques have been shown to help with anxiety and stress.

There is some evidence that combining these with acupuncture or non-hormonal medicines may decrease the frequency and severity of hot flashes.

**Non-hormone medicines** - medications without hormone properties that may be helpful in treating hot flashes include:

- The antidepressant venlafaxine (Efexor)
- The blood pressure drug clonidine (Catapres)
- The nerve drug gabapentin (Neurontin)
- If you are taking tamoxifen, it's important to note that some antidepressants can interact with tamoxifen and could make it less effective. Ask your doctor about any possible interactions between tamoxifen and any drugs you are taking.

(*American Cancer Society Medical Information. August 2016*)

**ALERT - Discuss with your oncologist or GP if acupuncture and/or non-hormonal medications are appropriate for you**