Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Acupressure for Pain and Headaches

This information explains how to use acupressure (AK-yoo-PREH-sher) to help with pain and headaches.

What is acupressure?

Acupressure is a kind of massage. It is based on the traditional Chinese medicine practice of acupuncture (AK-yoo-PUNK-cher). With acupressure, you put pressure on certain places on your body. These places are called acupoints (AK-yoo-poynts).

Pressing these acupoints can help your muscles relax and improve your blood flow. It can also help with many common side effects of chemotherapy, such as pain and headaches.

You can do acupressure at home by using your fingers to put pressure on different acupoints. Watch this video or follow the steps below to learn how to do acupressure.

Please visit www.mskcc.org/pe/acupressure_headache to watch this video.

Pressure point LI-4 (Hegu)

Pressure point LI-4 is also called Hegu (her-goo). It is found on the back of your hand. It is between the base of your thumb and index (pointer) finger (see Figure 1). Doing acupressure on this point can help with pain and headaches.

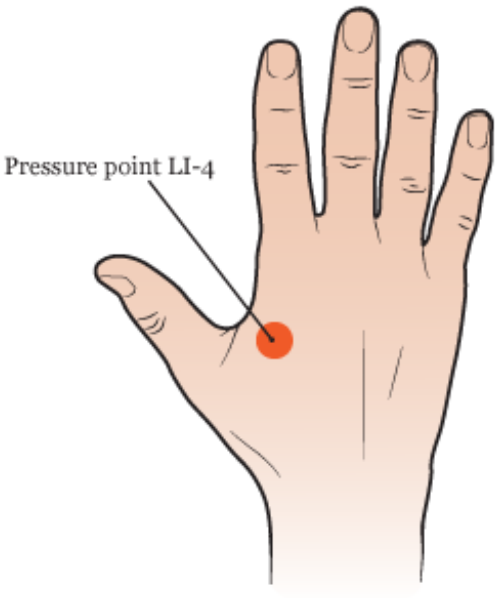

Figure 1. Pressure point LI-4 on back of hand

Do not do acupressure on this point if:

- You're pregnant. Pressing on this point can make you go into labor.
- The skin at or near the point is peeling or blistering.
- There is an open wound at or near the point.
- There is a rash at or near the point.
- There is redness, swelling, warmth, or pus at or near the point.

How to find pressure point LI-4

1. Position your hand so your fingers are pointing up and the back of your hand is facing you.
2. Place the thumb of your other hand in the space between your thumb and index finger (see Figure 2). This is pressure point LI-4. If you have trouble finding it, squeeze your thumb and index finger together. This creates a slight bulge in the muscle between these fingers. The pressure point is at the highest point of the bulge (see Figure 3).
    - Once you have found the pressure point, you can relax your hand and keep it in a comfortable position.

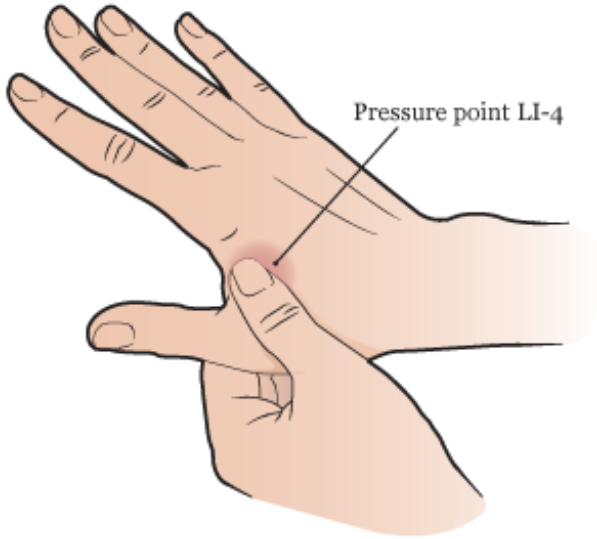

Figure 2. Finding the space between thumb and index finger

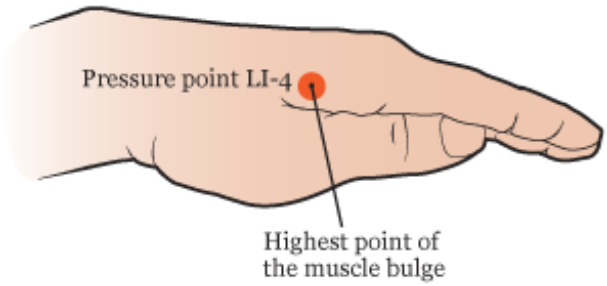

Figure 3. Finding the highest point of the muscle bulge

3. Press down on this point with your thumb. Move your thumb in a circle while applying pressure. You can move it in clockwise (to the right) or counterclockwise (to the left) circles. Do this for 2 to 3 minutes.
    - Some people may find it hard to use their thumb. You can use a pencil eraser instead.
    - Be firm when applying pressure, but do not press so hard that it hurts. You may feel some aching or tenderness, but it should not be painful. If you feel any pain, you're pressing down too hard.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 on your other hand.

You can do acupressure on this point a few times a day until your symptoms get better.

Acupressure is a complementary therapy. Complementary therapies are treatments you can use along with your cancer treatments. They can help ease your symptoms.

Visit www.msk.org/integrativemedicine or call MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service at 646-449-1010 to learn about other complementary therapies.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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