“The headaches were debilitating… My staff says they appreciate me smiling again.”

How bad were Loretta Todaro’s headaches? They weren’t quite a poke in the eye with a sharp stick. But they were easily severe enough that the thought of a few needles stuck in her face didn’t faze her in the least.

The migraines began in late December, said Todaro, manager of the hospital’s Eye Clinic. “They wouldn’t go away,” she said. “It got so it was hard to remember when I didn’t have a headache.”

Narcotics prescribed by her primary care physician didn’t help, and she describes a subsequent intramuscular and IV “migraine cocktail infusion” of steroids and other medications as “horrible.” So she decided to abandon medication, and give acupuncture a try.

“I’d done it about 25 years ago,” she said, “and had a vague recollection of what it was like.”

Decision pays off. She’s glad she made the decision. Four treatments with acupuncturist Ban Wong of The Center for Integrative Medicine (see accompanying story) have brought her, she said, the relief she had been seeking.

Needles don’t produce pain, says Todaro, who wants to “break down barriers” that prevent people from considering acupuncture treatment.
“The headaches were debilitating,” she said, recalling she walked about the clinic with her eyes squinted against the pain. “My staff says they appreciate me smiling again.”

Todaro wanted to take her experience a step farther, though, and show people they have nothing to fear from the acupuncturist’s needles. So she invited the Insider to watch and photograph one of her treatments earlier this month.

As she lay on the exam table, Wong withdrew small, thin needles from sterile packaging – needles are never reused – and began placing them in Todaro’s feet and lower legs. The locations, he explained, were based on Todaro’s “meridians,” the channels through which her Qi, or energy, flow.

“They’re like energy freeways,” Todaro quipped.

**Finding the balance.** Traditional Chinese Medicine, of which acupuncture is one component, teaches that when the body and mind are in perfect balance, Qi flows freely through the meridians. But physical and emotional stress and other factors can block or unbalance the flow.

To counteract that, the acupuncturist stimulates the meridians with the needles. Wong also applied electrical impulses to some of the needles as he treated Todaro.

“The question is how to find the balance,” in the body’s network of energy channels, Wong said.

Wong also placed needles in Todaro’s forehead. They weren’t painful, she said. “The area might tighten up, but they don’t hurt.”

Acupuncture may still be a mysterious and unconventional treatment for people used to the empirical Western approach, Todaro acknowledged. “But I want to help break down that barrier and help people overcome their fears,” she said. “It can give relief from pain and restore people to better health.”