

How Acupuncture Can Relieve Pain and Improve Sleep, Digestion and Emotional Well-being

Acupuncture is a 3,000-year-old healing technique of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 1997, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) documented and publicized acupuncture's safety and efficacy for treating a wide range of conditions. Acupuncture is now covered by many insurance policies and is used most broadly to relieve pain.

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture improves the body's functions and promotes the natural self-healing process by stimulating specific anatomic sites--commonly referred to as acupuncture points, or acupoints. The most common method used to stimulate acupoints is the insertion of fine, sterile needles into the skin. Pressure, heat, or electrical stimulation may further enhance the effects. Other acupoint stimulation techniques include: manual massage, moxibustion or heat therapy, cupping, and the application of topical herbal medicines and linaments.

Traditional Chinese Medicine is based on an ancient philosophy that describes the universe, and the body, in terms of two opposing forces: yin and yang. When these forces are in balance, the body is healthy. Energy, called "qi" (pronounced "chee") flows along specific pathways, called meridians, throughout the body. This constant flow of energy keeps the yin and yang forces balanced. However, if the flow of energy gets blocked, like water getting stuck behind a dam, the disruption can lead to pain, lack of function, or illness. Acupuncture therapy can release blocked qi in the body and stimulate function, evoking the body's natural healing response through various physiological systems. Modern research has demonstrated acupuncture's effects on the nervous system, endocrine and immune systems, cardiovascular system, and digestive system. By stimulating the body's various systems, acupuncture can help to resolve pain, and improve sleep, digestive function, and sense of well-being.

What happens during an acupuncture treatment?

First, your acupuncturist will ask about your health history. Then, he or she will examine your tongue's shape, color, and coating, feel your pulse, and possibly perform some additional physical examinations depending on your individual health needs. Using these unique assessment tools, the acupuncturist will be able to recommend a proper treatment plan to address your particular condition. To begin the acupuncture treatment, you lay comfortably on a treatment table while precise acupoints are stimulated on various areas of your body. Most people feel no or minimal discomfort as the fine needles are gently placed. The needles are usually retained between five and 30 minutes. During and after treatments, people report that they feel very relaxed.

How many treatments will I need?

The frequency and number of treatments differ from person to person. Some people experience dramatic relief in the first treatment. For complex or long-standing chronic conditions, one to two treatments per week for several months may be recommended. For acute problems, usually fewer visits are required, usually eight to ten visits in total. An individualized treatment plan that includes the expected number of treatments will be discussed during your initial visit.

What conditions are commonly treated by acupuncture?

Hundreds of clinical studies on the benefits of acupuncture show that it successfully treats conditions ranging from musculoskeletal problems (back pain, neck pain, and others) to nausea, migraine headache, anxiety, depression, insomnia, and infertility.

Case-controlled clinical studies have shown that acupuncture has been an effective treatment for the following diseases, symptoms or conditions:

Allergic rhinitis (including hay fever)
Biliary colic
Depression (including depressive neurosis and depression following stroke)
Dysentery, acute bacillary
Dysmenorrhoea, primary
Epigastralgia, acute (in peptic ulcer, acute and chronic gastritis, and gastrospasm)
Facial pain (including craniomandibular disorders)
Headache
Hypertension, essential
Hypotension, primary
Induction of labor
Knee pain
Leukopenia
Low back pain
Malposition of fetus, correction
Morning sickness
Nausea and vomiting
Neck pain
Pain in dentistry (including dental pain and temporomandibular dysfunction)
Periarthritis of shoulder
Postoperative pain
Renal colic
Rheumatoid arthritis
Sciatica
Sprain
Stroke
Tennis elbow

The following diseases, symptoms or conditions have limited but probable evidence to support the therapeutic use of acupuncture:

Abdominal pain (in acute gastroenteritis or due to gastrointestinal spasm)

Acne vulgaris

Alcohol dependence and detoxification

Bell's palsy

Bronchial asthma

Cancer pain

Cardiac neurosis

Cholecystitis, chronic, with acute exacerbation

Cholelithiasis

Competition stress syndrome

Craniocerebral injury, closed

Diabetes mellitus, non-insulin-dependent

Earache

Epidemic haemorrhagic fever

Epistaxis, simple (without generalized or local disease)

Eye pain due to subconjunctival injection

Female infertility

Facial spasm

Female urethral syndrome

Fibromyalgia and fasciitis

Gastrokinetic disturbance

Gouty arthritis

Hepatitis B virus carrier status

Herpes zoster (human (alpha) herpesvirus 3)

Hyperlipaemia

Hypo-ovarianism

Insomnia

Labour pain

Lactation, deficiency

Male sexual dysfunction, non-organic

Ménière disease

Neuralgia, post-herpetic

Neurodermatitis

Obesity

Opium, cocaine and heroin dependence

Osteoarthritis

Pain due to endoscopic examination

Pain in thromboangiitis obliterans

Polycystic ovary syndrome (Stein-Leventhal syndrome)

Post-extubation in children

Postoperative convalescence

Premenstrual syndrome

Prostatitis, chronic

Pruritus
Radicular and pseudoradicular pain syndrome
Raynaud syndrome, primary
Recurrent lower urinary-tract infection
Reflex sympathetic dystrophy
Retention of urine, traumatic
Schizophrenia
Sialism, drug-induced (excessive salivation)
Sjögren syndrome
Sore throat (including tonsillitis)
Spine pain, acute
Stiff neck
Temporomandibular joint dysfunction
Tietze syndrome
Tobacco dependence
Tourette syndrome
Ulcerative colitis, chronic
Urolithiasis
Vascular dementia
Whooping cough (pertussis)

<http://cim.ucsd.edu/clinical-care/acupuncture.shtml> (14/8/2017)