



Tampa Meeting

- What Role for Acupuncture in Chronic Disease?

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February 2010

Scientists aren't ready to claim that acupuncture works for any specific disease -yet. But studies supported by the **NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)** have yielded promising evidence that this ancient practice modifies perception of pain and its processing by the brain and that it may be helpful for pain management.

Using the latest technologies in neuroimaging and genomics, Richard Nahin, Ph.D., M.P.H., NCCAM's Senior Advisor for Scientific Coordination and Outreach and other NCCAM-support scientists are drawing a scientifically coherent picture of how acupuncture affects the body. ***They can see physiological effects – changes in the brain's pain centers – with acupuncture. They've observed gene expression and molecular changes in the nervous and immune systems, and they hope one day to be able to predict which patients are most likely to benefit from acupuncture.***

The process of acupuncture involves stimulating points on the body, using thin, solid, metallic needles that are manipulated by hand or by electrical stimulation. Chinese tradition teaches acupuncture practitioners that the aim is to improve levels of qi, which is considered the energy force behind all life, and restore the balance in the opposing forces of yin and yang. The needles are placed along meridians, invisible energy channels described in ancient Chinese manuscripts as running the length of the body.

To date, much of the progress in clinical research on acupuncture has come from an interdisciplinary approach that includes experts in acupuncture, clinical trial methodology, biostatistics, and relevant diseases such as osteoarthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome.

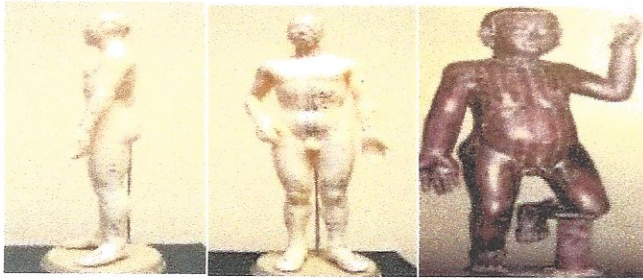
Dr. Xiaoming Tian, L.Ac., C.M.D., a member of the National Advisory Council for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, says "In my experience, acupuncture can be used for a number of symptoms and conditions, most often as complementary therapy." He reports that, in his clinic in Bethesda, Maryland, most patients seek acupuncture treatment for pain and pain-related conditions. He says, ***"In arthritis, I have often found acupuncture beneficial – for joint pain, swelling, stiffness, and joint function, as well as range of motion.*** I find that it is best used in the early stages of disease."

Dr. Tian believes that it is important to work with the patient's physicians and other medical professionals in order to provide the best care and service for patients. He comments, "We find that acupuncture works well in conjunction with conventional treatments – such as surgery, physical therapy, chemotherapy, and radiation – and with chiropractic therapy."

Dr. Tian says that over 80 symptoms and conditions are treated in his clinic, including chronic and acute pain, osteoarthritis, fibromyalgia, sciatica and neuralgia, autoimmune diseases, and allergies and asthma.

Bruce Rosen, M.D., Ph. D., principal investigator of an NCCAM Center of Excellence on Acupuncture and Brain Activity, at Harvard Medical School, says, "***There's something about the specifics of acupuncture that seem to evoke a more dramatic response in certain parts of the brain than other kinds of sensory stimuli. It suggests there's something special about acupuncture that's worth trying to understand.***"

Source: Excerpted from "Acupuncture and Pain: Applying Modern Science to an Ancient Practice," Complementary and Alternative Medicine: Focus on Research and Care, NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, February 2010



According to Traditional Chinese Medicine

Acupuncture works by applying a thin needle to an acupuncture point located along the meridian - a channel like structure. Each of 14 meridians controls a set of physiological functions of corresponding internal organs throughout the body. Acupuncture achieves its effect by regulating "Qi" movement in the meridian. "Qi" is a conceptual energy substance that travels in the meridians to influence the functions of internal organs. Disruption of Qi movement and abnormally high and low of Qi are used to explain the symptoms or diseases. Similarly, by up-regulating or down-regulating the functions of internal organs through "Qi", acupuncture achieves its therapeutic aims and correct the imbalance.

Acupuncture & Natural Medicine

Dr. Peng in Bethesda and Rockville

Gang Peng cMD, Ph.D., L. Ac.

Dr. Peng is an acupuncturist and researcher. He is principal at Acupuncture & Natural Medicine. He is a graduate of Beijing University of (Traditional) Chinese Medicine (M.B. or cMD) in Beijing, China and Wayne State University (Ph.D.) in Detroit, Michigan. He is a well-trained acupuncturist and immunologist. In addition to his own practice, he is also a member (acupuncturist) of Pain and Palliative Care Service (PPCS) at the *Clinical Center of National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, Maryland) since 2005.*

Dr. Peng also has long-term interests in medical research. He was a research fellow at National Institutes of Health. ***He conducted researches on inflammatory and infectious diseases*** including HIV/AIDS. Of his researches, he contributed to the establishment of a new potential anti-HIV mechanism (interferon and APOBEC).



Reducing inflammation and pain

Insertion of needles leads to attraction of immune cells to the acupuncture points through chemotactic Process as part of wound healing mechanism. The immune cells then release significant amount of anti-inflammatory proteins-leading to reduce the inflammation. As many pain symptoms are the result of inflammation such as low back pain and joint arthritis, the needle-induced anti-inflammatory activity reduce the pain.

Balancing nerve systems by acting on parasympathetic and sympathetic nerves

Many symptoms that acupuncture can treat are the result of imbalance of sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. Symptoms such as stress/anxiety, nausea/vomiting, abdominal bloating are the result of hyperactive sympathetic or hypoactive parasympathetic nerves (vagus nerve). Acupuncture on a number of acupuncture points stimulate vagus nerve to rebalance the nerve systems.

Acting on peripheral nerves to influence central nerve system and treat peripheral nerve abnormality

Applying needles to acupuncture points stimulates peripheral nerve activity, which in turns to act on the brain. In neural sciences, more than 60 studies using MRI imaging approach have demonstrated different acupuncture points could activate different brain regions, implying its contribution to treat pain, stress, migraine, insomnia, and Parkinson's diseases. Also, acupuncture can be used correct abnormality of peripheral nerves to treat diseases including peripheral neuropathy and shingles.

右肩痛 (Right shoulder pain)
大(中)动脉炎 (vasculitis)
(ESR) 血沉高 } 炎症
CRP高

Indications for Acupuncture

Symptoms and Diseases

Followings are the comprehensive list of acupuncture indications. However, acupuncture therapy is not limited to these conditions. Indications for acupuncture is of a wide spectrum of clinic symptoms and diseases. Moreover, Many studies have been on-going to expand acupuncture indications. Please consult Dr. Peng for details.

Acute and chronic low back pain (LBP) including muscle spasms, disc herniation etc.

Sciatic pain

Migraine and other headaches

Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) pain & dysfunction

Neck / shoulder pain

Shoulder injury (frozen shoulder, or adhesive capsulitis)

Fibromyalgia

Myofascial pain

Knee joint pain and knee injury

Hip joint pain including trochanteric bursitis

Tennis elbow

Golf elbow

Arthritic joint pains including osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis

Carpal tunnel syndrome

Thumb pain (CMC joint pain)

Ankle sprain

Peripheral neuropathy

Post-herpetic neuralgia

Menstrual pain (Dysmenorrhea)

Premenstrual syndrome

Menopausal symptoms (Hot flash and night sweat)

Nausea / vomiting including chemotherapy induced

Stress / anxiety including panic attack

Moderate to severe depression

Gastroparesis (abdominal bloating)

Fatigue & weakness

Insomnia

Irritable bowel syndrome

Acute & chronic diarrhea

Constipation

Urticaria

Itchiness

Hiccup

Tinnitus

Cough

Asthma and related breathing difficulty

Urinary incontinence

Retention of urine

Allergy

Stroke rehabilitation

Hemiplegia / paraplegia

Bell's Palsy

Facial twitching

Essential tremor

Obesity (Weight loss)

Maintaining general well-being

Smoking

ADHD

Dr. Peng's approach for acupuncture

Dr. Peng's practice is rooted from Traditional Chinese Medicine. He conducts diagnosis and therapeutic design based on the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Dr. Peng emphasizes the concept of personalized medicine. Each individual has his or her own (physical) condition that contributes to the presenting symptoms or diseases. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is important to consider individual overall condition in addition to focus the local problem when it comes to therapeutic design. It is this combined local and overall body-based approach delivers the most effective treatment., Dr. Peng follows closely current advance in basic and clinic research including acupuncture and other medical development. He informs his patients with update medical progress and incorporates useful information into his acupuncture practice.

Acupuncture & Natural Medicine Dr. Peng in Bethesda and Rockville

To make appointment call: 301 340 8444

Dr. Peng has two convenient locations in both Bethesda and Rockville. Parking is free.

In Rockville:

**2401 Research Blvd, Suite 380
Rockville, MD 20850**

Office hours:

Tuesday: 1:30 pm to 6:00 pm
Wednesday: 1:30 pm to 6:00 pm
Thursday: 1:30 pm to 6:00 pm
Friday: 8:30 am to 12:00 pm
Saturday: 8:00 am to 1:00 pm

In Bethesda:

**Wildwood building
10401 Old Georgetown Rd, suite 406
Bethesda, MD 20814**

Office Hours:

Monday: 8:00 am to 11:30 am
4:30 pm to 6:00 pm
Tuesday: 8:00 am to 12:00 pm
Wednesday: 8:00 am to 12:00 pm.
Friday: 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Appointment is required. Patients are encouraged to call before come to the office.



Acupuncture procedure

Acupuncturist applies hair-thin needles on acupuncture points located on the specific areas of the skin. This thin needle-based procedure, in contrast to bigger needles used to draw blood, is painless most times. The acupuncture procedure is performed under a relaxed environment. Often, a mild electric stimulation was applied to needles to improve the treatment intensity. Each session takes about 45 minutes. It resolves or reduces symptoms several hours or overnight for acute situation such as pain. However, for chronic conditions, more treatments are required. As a general rule, once or twice a week with a total of 6-8 sessions acupuncture are suggested.

Personalized medicine is the core of acupuncture practice

Personalized medicine is an emerging concept in recent years. It requires doctor to conduct diagnosis and treatment with the emphasize on patient's own conditions including genetic background, differential drug sensitivity, and overall physiological condition in addition to presenting symptoms or disease.

While this concept is new in modern medical care, individualized treatment has been practiced in Traditional Chinese Medicine for thousand years. As a golden rule of Traditional Chinese Medicine, a doctor is required to conduct examination (by tongue and pulse) to determine or define patient's the overall conditions that may directly or indirectly contribute to patient's primary symptoms or diseases. For example, the headache from different individuals could be of very different causes judged by Traditional Chinese Medicine.

In the treatment design, acupuncture points are selected:

- (1) to target primary symptoms and
- (2) to target the overall body conditions.

Only by combining both approaches acupuncture achieves its goal of balancing Yin/Yang that fundamentally corrects symptoms or illness.

How long is each acupuncture session?

A typical acupuncture treatment takes about 45 minutes. It includes placing and taking out the needles to acupuncture points and allowing needles remained at the points for 30 minutes. During this 30 minutes, patient is placed in a relaxed environment which helps to improve the treatment outcome.

How many and how often is acupuncture treatment required?

Numbers of required treatment depend on the patient's condition. As a general rule, 1-2 times of treatments are sufficient for acute conditions such as acute low back pain. 6-8 times as one course of treatment is needed for the chronic conditions.

As effect of acupuncture usually last a few days, patients usually visit the clinic twice a week for first 2-3 weeks followed once a week for later times.

How does acupuncture works?

Acupuncture inserts the fine sterilized needles into acupuncture points. Acupuncture points are located in 14 different meridians distributed over the entire human body. According to the theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine, each meridian regulates a set of body functions. Acupuncture through needling on acupuncture points to adjust the body's conditions and corrects the dysfunction of human body. Description of meridians and acupuncture points has existed at least two thousand years. In modern times, many scientific research has been done on acupuncture points and acupuncture effect in both basic research and clinic aspects.

Does acupuncture have side effects?

Adverse effect of acupuncture is very rare as acupuncture is a moderate approach to adjust body's physiological condition and procedure is very mild compared to other medical procedures.

Common side effects maybe things such as occasional pain when needles touch the nerve or occasional bleeding (a drop of blood) when needles touch the small blood vessel. In some occasions. The bleeding can be stopped by pressing the point for a few seconds.

Who should be careful when deciding to receive acupuncture?

Women in pregnancy or has intent to be pregnant at the time should inform doctor before receiving acupuncture. Acupuncture on certain points may affect the pregnancy.

Patients has low platelet count or bleeding tendency should inform doctor before the treatment to avoid bruise or unnecessary subcutaneous bleeding.

Can I receive other therapy while I am getting acupuncture?

Yes. In fact, acupuncture in most of cases can work together with other therapies. It is common for patients receive acupuncture while receiving physical therapy in the same time. Medication usually does not affect acupuncture. However, patients should inform the doctor the other treatments he or she is receiving so that the doctor can incorporate this consideration into treatment design.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where was Dr. Peng trained for acupuncture?

Dr. Peng is a graduate from Beijing University of (Traditional) Chinese Medicine, Beijing, China in 1982. The school is the highest ranking medical school for training doctors to practice acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western medicine.

Where is Dr. Peng credentialed outside of his clinic?

Dr. Peng is also credentialed at Clinical Center of National Institutes of Health (NIH). As a member of pain and palliative care team, he serves as main acupuncturist for NIH.

What is Dr. Peng's approach for acupuncture treatment?

Dr. Peng practices acupuncture according to the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It emphasizes the balance of Yin-Yang, regulation of Qi movement and adjustment of functions of internal organs. His practice also incorporates concept of current medical diagnosis/treatment into the treatment design.

What is the concept of personalized medicine in Dr. Peng's practice?

Personalized medical care is at the heart of Dr. Peng's practice. Personalized medicine that focuses on individual information, genetic basis, and individual response to drugs are the future of medical practice. Dr. Peng uses traditional approach to define the diagnosis and to design the treatment strategy that is based on individual situations.

Traditional Chinese Medicine gives highest emphasize on personalized medicine. It recognized every individual is different. Each patient may present different body conditions (background) while having similar symptoms or diseases. The acupuncture is designed based on the goal to correct overall patient's own abnormal body condition as well as treating the presenting symptoms.

Does Dr. Peng accept insurance?

Yes. Dr. Peng accepts most insurances that covers acupuncture. Insurance for acupuncture varies significantly. Dr. Peng is a member of CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield Network. The best way to check if you are covered for acupuncture is to call your insurance before you come. Or when you come to the clinic, we will call your insurance to verify the coverage.

Do I need to pay a fee for consultation?

Patient is welcome to visit the clinic and to inquire information about acupuncture. If you did not receive the treatment, you don't have to pay. Consultation is free.

Does acupuncture hurt?

Modern acupuncture is largely a painless procedure. It uses hair-thin needles. The needles penetrate top layer of skin quickly. In most cases, patients feel no more than prickle-like feeling. However, in a few cases, patient may feel some pain when needles accidentally reach the nerve or blood vessel. When it happened, the needle would be taken off or replaced. In general, acupuncture treatment is a very comfortable method.



History of Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a main component of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The earliest acupuncture evidence can be dated back to 168BC. The unearthed book described the distribution of meridians in the human body.

Later, there was "Huang Di Nei Jing"-the bible of Traditional Chinese Medicine (100BC or later), in which it documented the principles of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine. Ming Tang Jing (publishing date unknown) was first known book systemically described meridians, acupuncture points. In 282AD, Dr. Huang Pu Mi wrote a book, Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing. The book detailed 349 acupuncture points. Later, Zhen Jiu Da Cheng (1601AD) becomes one of the best known textbook that described in detail the acupuncture theory, acupuncture points, meridians, and treatment of various diseases.

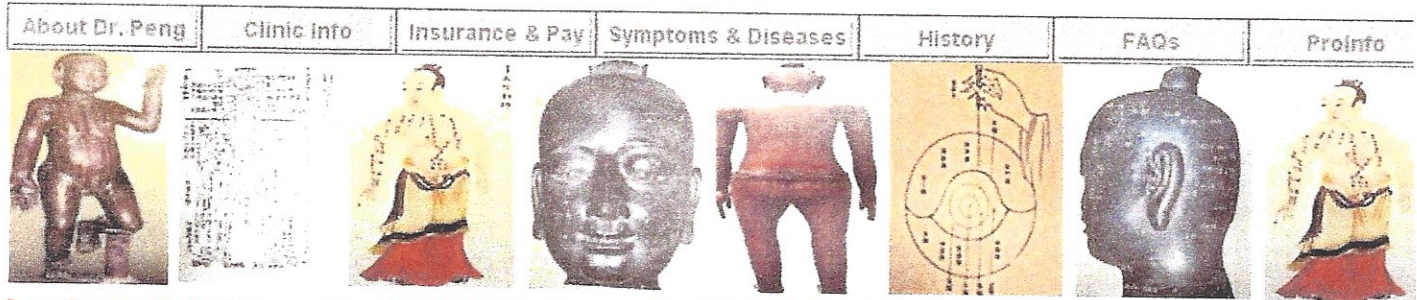
In modern time, acupuncture is widely practiced in China in almost every hospital in China. As monotherapy or complementary therapy, acupuncture has been used to treat many diseases including pain associated diseases, neuromuscular diseases, gastrointestinal diseases, and inflammatory diseases. It also gained notable success in acupuncture anesthesia. Extensive research on acupuncture has been conducted for last thirty years in both basic and clinic areas. It has produced a large quantity of publications on the mechanism and the clinic efficacy of acupuncture. Within China, there are more than 500 clinic studies published each year. For example, 350 clinic studies ranging from small trial to large scale controlled studies published in one journal- Chinese Acupuncture & Moxibustion in 2002 alone. Similarly, many clinical trial results on acupuncture were published worldwide in last 10-20 years.

Acupuncture started to gain popularity in US from 1972 when president Nixon visited China. Acupuncture as a complementary modality has been accepted or been known in US since 1970s'. Currently, more than ten thousand acupuncturists practice acupuncture. The number of people who received acupuncture are in a hundred thousand to millions. To better understand and evaluate acupuncture and other alternative therapies, US congress mandated the National Institute of Health to establish an agency now called National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to study alternative medicine including acupuncture. Clinic trials to evaluate acupuncture therapy are expanding. Efficacy of acupuncture on certain diseases such as osteoarthritis, chemotherapy-induced nausea/vomiting and chronic low back pain has been confirmed in the large clinic trials. Still, more trials are on-going.

Acupuncture & Natural Medicine

Dr. Peng in Bethesda and Rockville, of Maryland

(301) 340-8444

**Gang Peng cMD, Ph.D., L. Ac.**

Dr. Peng practices acupuncture in Bethesda and Rockville, Maryland. He is also an acupuncturist at National Institutes of Health. He graduated from Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Bachelor of Medicine 1982) in Beijing, China and Wayne State University (Ph.D 1992.) in Detroit, Michigan.

[Dr. Peng's profile](#)

**The office is located in Bethesda and Rockville**

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Wildwood medical center
10401 Old Georgetown Rd Ste 406
Bethesda, MD 20814

Rockville:
2401 Research Blvd. Ste 380
Rockville, MD 20850

For appointment, please call
301 340 8444.

[Dr. Peng's office](#)

Common indications for acupuncture:

Symptoms of the pain low back pain, knee pain, neck and shoulder pain and migraine, Occipital neuralgia, tennis elbow..

Neurological diseases

Essential tremor. Urinary incontinence, postural imbalance, restless leg syndrome, persistent nausea, muscle twitching, heavy legs, peripheral neuropathy.

Inflammatory diseases

Arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, IBS, Plantar fasciitis, Chronic sinusitis, Hip joint pain/bursitis..

[Detailed indications](#)

Low Back Pain
Low back pain / sciatica is the most common reason to do acupuncture. Disc bulging, herniation, arthritis, and spinal stenosis are indicated.

Allergy
Staffing nose, post-nasal drip, short of breath are common symptoms of seasonal allergy. Acupuncture is an effective treatment for it.

Hot flashes
Hot flashes and night sweats are two major symptoms menopausal syndrome. A course of acupuncture can reliably reduce hot flashes / night sweats in both frequency and intensity.

Peripheral neuropathy
Tingling, numbness and burning sensation are major symptoms of hand/feet neuropathy. It can be caused by various reasons. Acupuncture is one of the good option for this chronic disease.

Migraine
Acupuncture relieves or reduce migraine quickly. A course treatment can reduces pain in both intensity and frequency.

Parkinson's disease and essential tremor
Acupuncture reduces or stops tremors including essential tremor and Parkinson's tremor. It also reduces muscle rigidity.

Acnes
Acnes are common during puberty due to hormonal change. It is characterized by pimples, greasy skin and saring in face and scalp. Acupuncture is one of the methods that reduce the acnes and its recurrence.

Tinnitus/hearing loss
Tinnitus often with the hearing loss is common and yet difficult to treat. Acupuncture is one of bes options to reduce tinnitus and improve the hearing. Acupuncture is also an useful tool for acute hearing loss.

How Acupuncture Works

The needles are inserted to the acupuncture points that are located on 14 meridian lines throughout the body. According to Chinese medicine, the needles stimulate the movement of "Qi"-a conceptual energy substance to reduce the pain and balance body functions. In modern term, acupuncture acts on immune system to reduce inflammation and acts on brain / nerve system to reduce the pain, stress, and to relief other symptoms.



[More on how needle works](#)

Acupuncture procedure

Acupuncturist applies the hair-thin needles on acupuncture points of the skin. This procedure is mostly pain free. It is performed under a relaxed environment. The needles is required to stay inserted for 30-45 minutes. The whole procedure usually takes about 45-60 minutes. In a typical treatment, 6-8 treatments, once or twice a week, is usually required.

[Acupuncture Procedure](#)

**History of Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is about 2000 years old. The earliest evidence of meridians was dated 168BC. The book, Huang Di Nei Jing (Lingshu), described the basic forms of acupuncture. Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing (282 AD) documented 14 meridians and 349 acupuncture points. Current acupuncture practice is mostly combining ancient theories and modern clinic experience..

[More on history](#)



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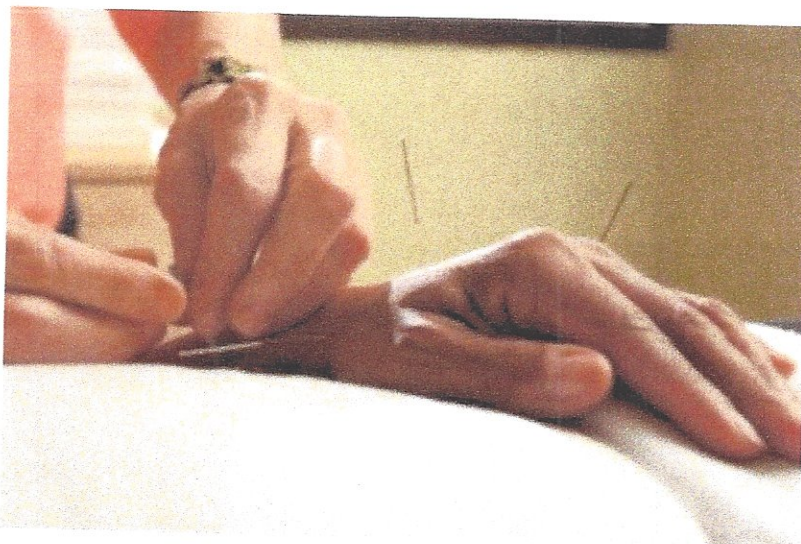
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<http://acupuncturecouncil.com/common-acupuncture-side-effects-what-is-normal-what-is-not/>

Common Acupuncture Side Effects

What is Normal what is not



Across North America people are becoming increasingly more open minded about natural healing remedies, as they continue in larger numbers to seek out alternative medical treatments, the traditional art of acupuncture is becoming more widely sought after by individuals who are fed-up with ailments and not receiving satisfactory results from their physicians. This is great news for the skilled acupuncturists who operate in this country; there is no doubt that population trend towards alternative medicine has benefited their acupuncture practices. However, as more clients arrive in their offices the increase potential for acupuncture malpractice suits are also significantly more likely. This is largely because as a larger amount of patients' flock to acupuncture facilities for their services, the likelihood of an incident or accident occurring increases this is just pure mathematics. However, the biggest concern regarding the increase in demand for acupuncture treatment is actually the worry about fraudulent malpractice suits or patients arriving who simply do not understand the process or procedures that acupuncture is based on. These misunderstandings can lead to lawsuits against the individual performing the acupuncture because they have not been diligent in explaining the procedure or preparing the individuals for the potential side effects that may occur immediately after receiving treatment.

What Your Patient Doesn't Know Can Hurt Them!

It is extremely important that new patients are informed about the risks and side effects that may occur when they receive any sort of acupuncture. It is in your best interest as the acupuncturist to provide the client with a consent form that goes over all of the associated risks and aftermath so that they can make an informed decision.

Before you proceed with the acupuncture treatment you will want to have the patient verbally express their acknowledgment as well as sign the consent forms confirming their understanding and initialing that you have explained to them fully what the process requires. If they have any questions regarding the procedure this will be the time to address them and if they wish to decline treatment, they should also be given the opportunity to do so.

Discussing Common Side Effects

If you have not yet done so, you may wish to begin handing out written materials that go over the common side effects that are associated with acupuncture treatment during and immediately following the procedure. Many people, may rush to the conclusion that they are experience abnormal phenomenon when they leave the office if they have not been prepared or provided the proper information. These patients may then rush out and begin a malpractice suit against you, the acupuncturist simply because they were not well informed. This is something that you need to be prepared to deal with and should have insurance for, just in case the claims are confirmed to be legitimated. That said, a simple hand out that defines the common side effects (and the potential rare ones) could help reduce the risk level of this occurring. If a patient is unsatisfied with the results of their treatment you can direct them to the correct information that they have consented too in the consultation process protecting yourself and your assets, while also making an effort to keep your patients calm and well informed.

A List of Normal Acupuncture Side Effects:

Fatigue Following a session of acupuncture the patient may feel fatigued or tired. This is actually a positive sign that the acupuncture is working. It is best that you recommend rest and relaxation following a treatment. If a patient appears particularly exhausted suggest that they phone a taxi or call a family member to drive them.

Soreness The body parts that have received the needles during the acupuncture session will feel sore for a few days, but residual or unexpected soreness can actually help identify trigger points or underlying medical issues. Have your patients inform you if they are experiencing any abnormal soreness (in areas that did not receive the needles) at their next appointment, or to phone in if the soreness proceeds for an extended amount of time.

Bruising Most of the time bruising should not occur if the acupuncture has been properly applied, however you should inform your patient that it is a possibility and nothing to be confirmed with. The best way to avoid this is to keep the dialogue open during treatment, have your patient inform you if you applying to much pressure or hurting them in any way.

Muscle Twitch As unpleasant and shocking, as it may be most people experience some sort of muscle twitching or spasm during or following acupuncture sessions. Make sure that you mention it is normal and once again check for your patient's level of comfort during the treatment process.

Lightheadedness Rarely, patients may faint after their treatment or experience extreme lightheadedness. Watch for this in new patients and recommend that they do not stand up too quickly or leave immediately after their session. It is important that you tell your patient that this is a possibility and observe them carefully after their first appointment.

Emotional Instability For many acupuncture can also be an emotional experience, not just physical. Patients can cry and feel a variety of emotional releases throughout their treatment. If this emotional state continues following the treatment so much so that the patient feels traumatized or depressed this should be noted. Although acupuncture holds many benefits for people, a select few may find the experience to be overwhelming and their treatment should be discontinued in order to avoid a potential lawsuit.

Why Acupuncturists Should Carry Insurance It is important that acupuncturists carry insurance as a cautionary measure because even if you do everything right something could still go wrong. Despite your best effort you cannot protect your patients from their own bodies reaction to the acupuncture process and like we mentioned above some patients may not be fully aware of the physical side effects that can normally occur when you receive acupuncture.

7 Acupuncture Side Effects That You Should Know About

02/20/2013 02:40 pm ET | Updated Apr 22, 2013

□ Sara Calabro Founder, AcuTake

The most common side effects of acupuncture are things everyone wants: better sleep, more energy, mental clarity, better digestion and less stress. One or several of these side effects occur routinely for many, many acupuncture goers.

Following the publication of [an article on the most common side effects of acupuncture](#), *AcuTake* received multiple inquiries from readers about certain unpleasant side effects of acupuncture and whether they too were common. And indeed, there are other, less-pleasant side effects of acupuncture. These additional side effects are much rarer than [the most common side effects of acupuncture](#), but they can and do occasionally happen.

None are life-threatening, and all typically are fleeting. Still, they are good to be aware of so that if you do experience them, you know they're normal and nothing to be too concerned about.

Infrequent but Possible Side Effects of Acupuncture

In my experience, the following seven side effects can occur after acupuncture ...

Worse symptoms

While most people notice a marked improvement in their symptoms following acupuncture, some feel worse before they start feeling better. In natural medicine circles, this is sometimes referred to as a healing crisis. The idea is that as your body starts undergoing the changes involved in moving toward health, things get stirred up. This can cause not only an exacerbation of current symptoms but also the recurrence of previous ailments that had been dormant.

Acupuncture awakens your self-healing capabilities. With that can come an onslaught of bodily awareness. This usually is a positive experience but it also can mean heightened sensitivity or intolerance for things that previously felt normal. An example of this is someone who unconsciously adapts to stress by tightening and hunching up his shoulders. After an acupuncture treatment, once this person's bodily felt sense has been woken up, his mild upper back and neck tension might start screaming. The good news about this side effect is that it's a sign that things are moving. In the case of acupuncture, this means that the primary objective is being met. That is, you are starting to transition on multiple levels from stuck to unstuck.

Fatigue

People can feel wiped out after acupuncture. A more common result is increased energy, but sometimes the “acu land” effect hangs on a little longer. This is your body telling you that it’s depleted. Feeling fatigued after acupuncture is not cause for concern, but it is a warning sign that you need to rest. If you have this experience, take it easy for the remainder of the day. Take a bath that night. Go to bed early. Come morning, the combination of acupuncture and rest will leave you feeling born again.

Soreness

Body parts where acupuncture needles get inserted can feel sore after needles are removed. I’ve found that this most commonly occurs with points in the hands and feet, especially [Large Intestine 4](#), an acupuncture point located between the thumb and index finger. You also may experience muscle soreness away from the needling site if a trigger or ashi point was released during your treatment.

Soreness from acupuncture typically dissipates within 24 hours. However, big trigger point releases can cause residual soreness that lasts a few days. Most acupuncturists will warn you about this before you leave your appointment.

Bruising

Although less common than soreness, bruising can occur at the needling site. Sometimes bruising is the result of a hematoma, a localized collection of blood that gets initiated when the needle punctures the skin. Bruises, unfortunately, usually last longer than soreness from an acupuncture needle. Still, they generally are not anything to worry about beyond the aesthetic inconvenience.

It is unknown why some people bruise from acupuncture. I have a few patients who, no matter what I try in terms of needle brand, size or technique, they bruise every time. (Again, I often see it happen at [Large Intestine 4](#).) Others — the majority — never experience bruising anywhere.

Muscle twitching

Every time I get acupuncture, no matter where the needles are placed, my right quadricep muscle twitches like crazy. Don’t ask me why. People may experience involuntary muscle twitching during or after acupuncture. I’ve seen this occur in muscles that receive acupuncture needles and, as in my case, on seemingly random parts of the body that are far away from any needles.

Muscle twitching . continued

Muscle twitching is different from full-on muscle spasm. If during or after an acupuncture treatment you feel that one of your muscles is acutely spasming, especially if it's a muscle that was just needled, tell your acupuncturist. He or she might be able to release it before you go on your merry way.

Lightheadedness

This is pretty rare, but it can happen — and on very rare occasions, post-acupuncture lightheadedness can result in fainting. Getting up quickly from the acupuncture table can cause lightheadedness, as can coming for acupuncture on an empty stomach. Remember that eating is one of the [key things to remember before an acupuncture appointment](#).

When your acupuncture session is over, take your time getting up and move gently as you gather your things to leave. If you find yourself feeling lightheaded after the treatment, sit in your acupuncturist's waiting room for a few minutes and take some deep breaths. Acupuncture can be a physically and emotionally intense experience, and sometimes our bodies are not fully recovered at exactly the moment our hour is up. It is okay if you need a little extra time.

Emotional release

Sometimes people cry in acupuncture. Not because they're in pain, but because their emotions, which can get stifled while powering through life, become free-flowing. The emotional release that can happen in acupuncture usually is a positive experience, but it can be surprising, especially for people who tend to be more emotionally stoical.

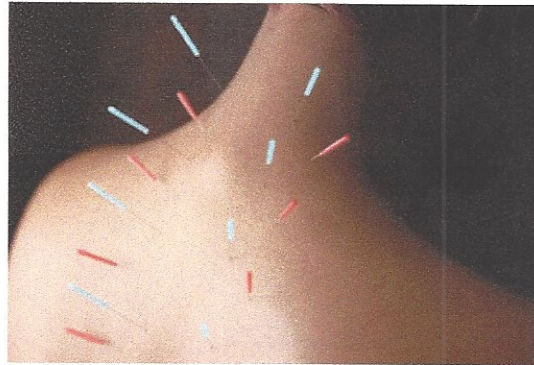
Feeling extra sensitive or tear-prone in an acupuncture session, or in the days that follow, is completely normal. It's also a sign that the acupuncture is working. Even if you're seeking acupuncture for a physical ailment, increased emotional expression is an indication that healing is happening. From an acupuncture perspective, physical and emotional health are interconnected, so emotional shifts suggest forthcoming physical changes as well.

While these side effects are rarely cause for concern, you know your body best. If any of the above side effects, feel like they're too severe or lasting too long — or if you notice any additional negative reactions to an acupuncture treatment — you should contact your acupuncturist.

Visit [AcuTake](#) to learn more about acupuncture and acupressure. To find an acupuncturist near you, visit the [AcuTake Acupuncturist Directory](#).

WHAT is ACUPUNCTURE

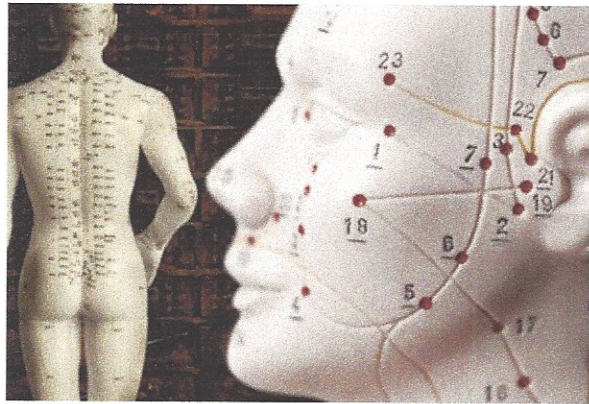
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What Is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is an age-old healing practice of traditional Chinese medicine in which thin needles are placed at specific points in the body. It's primarily used to relieve pain but also has been used to treat other conditions. More than 3 million Americans use acupuncture, but it is even more popular in other countries. In France, for example, one in five people has tried acupuncture.

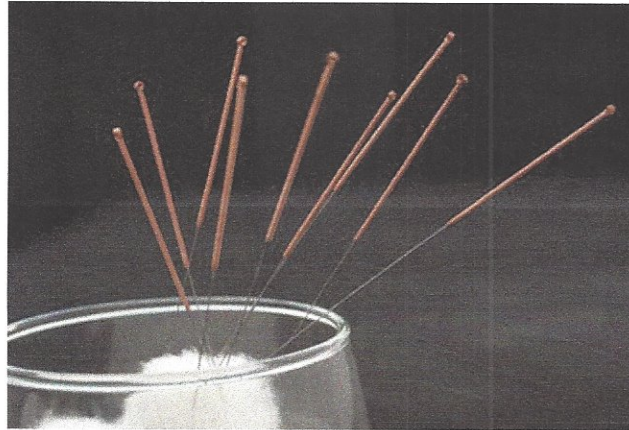
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How Acupuncture Works

Acupuncture seeks to release the flow of the body's vital energy or "chi" by stimulating points along 14 energy pathways. Scientists say the needles cause the body to release endorphins -- natural painkillers -- and may boost blood flow and change brain activity. Skeptics say acupuncture works only because people believe it will, an effect called the placebo effect.

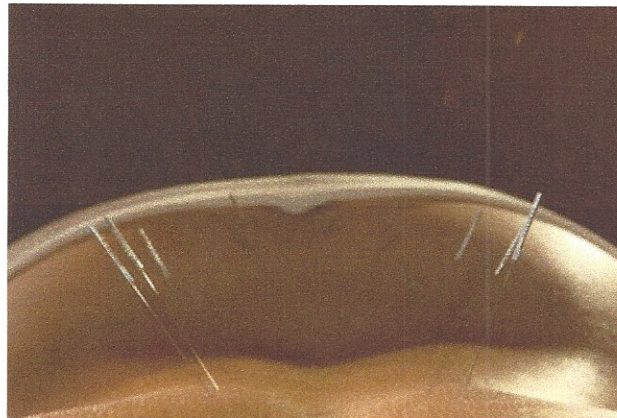
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Does Acupuncture Hurt?

Acupuncture needles are very thin, and most people feel no pain or very little pain when they are inserted. They often say they feel energized or relaxed after the treatment. However, the needles can cause temporary soreness.

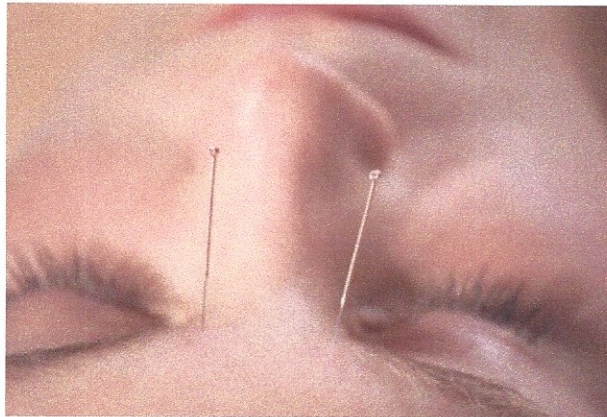
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Acupoint: Low-Back Pain

If standard treatments don't relieve your chronic low-back pain, acupuncture may do the job, and two respected medical groups suggest that people in this situation give it a try. One large study found that both actual and "fake" acupuncture worked better than conventional treatments for back pain that had lasted more than three months. The jury's still out on acupuncture for short-term (acute) pain in the low back.

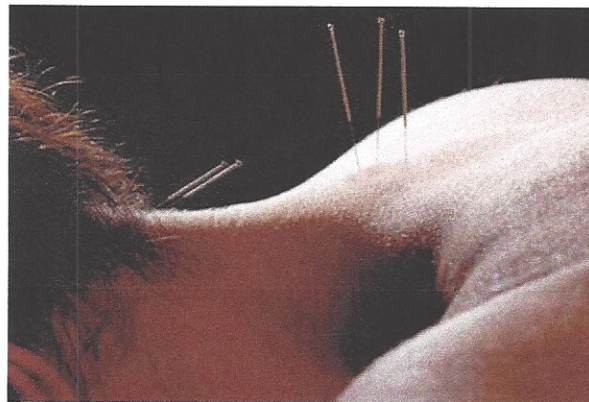
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Acupoint: Headaches

Acupuncture may help relieve migraines or tension headaches. Two large studies found that people receiving acupuncture had fewer days with tension headaches than those receiving conventional care.

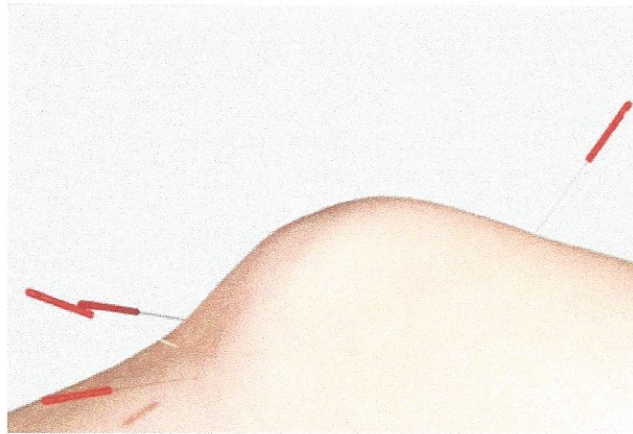
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Acupoint: Fibromyalgia

Studies that test how well acupuncture works against the pain of fibromyalgia have had mixed results. Some showed that it provided temporary pain relief, but others did not. A small study by the Mayo Clinic suggested that acupuncture may reduce two other problems of fibromyalgia: fatigue and anxiety. But overall, there's not enough evidence yet to prove that acupuncture works for fibromyalgia.

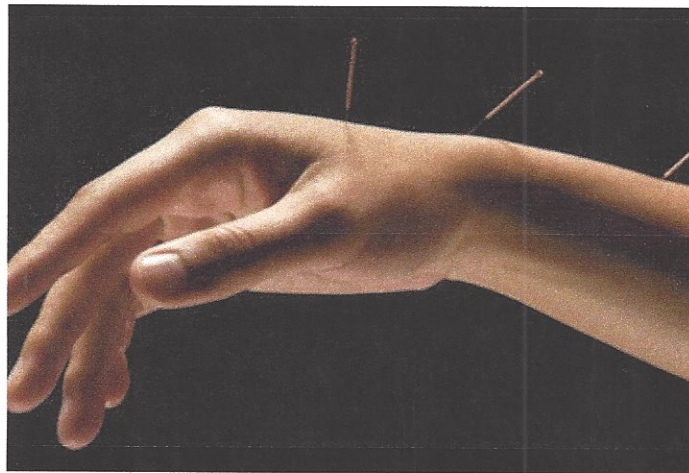
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Acupoint: Arthritis Pain

Acupuncture can be a helpful addition to conventional treatment for osteoarthritis, says the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. And some of the most promising, early research has shown acupuncture eased arthritis pain in the knee. However, more research is needed to prove without a doubt that it's effective for osteoarthritis.

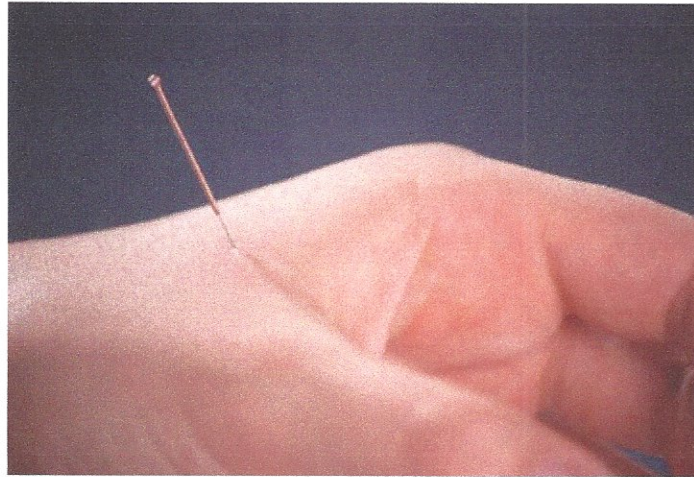
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Acupoint: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Acupuncture was tested and compared with steroid pills for the hand and arm pain of carpal tunnel syndrome. Researchers in Taiwan gave one group eight acupuncture treatments, over about a month, and those patients reported more relief, for a longer time, than the group taking medicine. While studies like this have been promising, more evidence is still needed to confirm that acupuncture is effective for carpal tunnel syndrome.

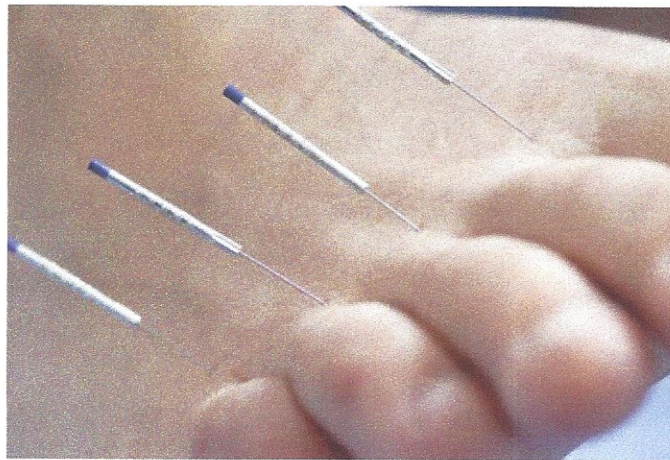
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Acupoint: Dental Pain

Acupuncture provides relief from the pain of tooth extraction or dental surgery, but so does fake acupuncture, some studies show. Still, dental pain is considered by many to be one of the conditions that responds to acupuncture.

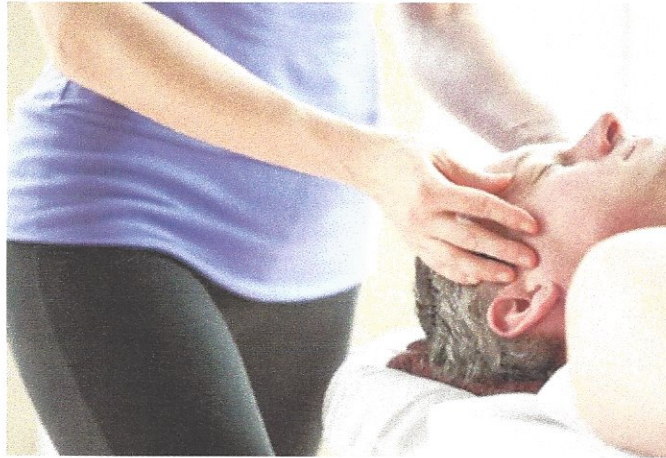
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Acupoint: Other Pain

People have tried acupuncture for neck pain, muscle pain, tennis elbow, and menstrual cramps, hoping to avoid medications and their side effects. The World Health Organization lists 28 different conditions that are sometimes treated with acupuncture. In the U.S., a review by the National Institutes of Health called for robust research to verify the promise that acupuncture holds for many different conditions.

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A Boost for Pain Medicine

Acupuncture may provide added pain relief when it's used along with pain medicine or another therapy, such as massage. Acupuncture can reduce the need for drugs and improve the quality of life of people with chronic pain.

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Acupoint: Nausea

Acupuncture at the pericardium (P6) acupoint on the wrist can reduce the symptoms of nausea and vomiting, even after cancer drug treatments or surgery. Studies compared 10 different acupuncture methods -- including needles, electrical stimulation, and acupressure -- to drugs that block nausea or vomiting and found the acupuncture treatments worked.

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Acupuncture and Cancer Care

Because acupuncture can lessen pain, nausea, and vomiting, it is sometimes used to help people cope with symptoms of cancer or chemotherapy. It also can help manage hot flashes associated with breast cancer. Be sure to talk to your doctor first and seek a practitioner who has experience working with cancer patients.

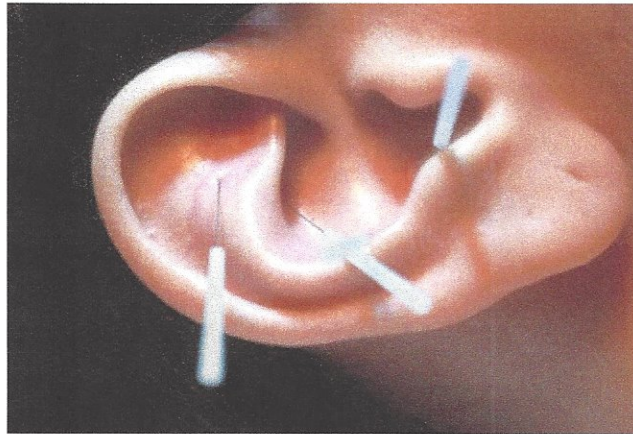
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Acupuncture and Fertility

Celebrities such as singers Celine Dion and Mariah Carey credited acupuncture -- used along with infertility treatments -- with helping them get pregnant. A review of medical studies backs up this view, suggesting that acupuncture may boost the effectiveness of fertility treatments. One theory holds that acupuncture helps by reducing stress and increasing blood flow to the ovaries.

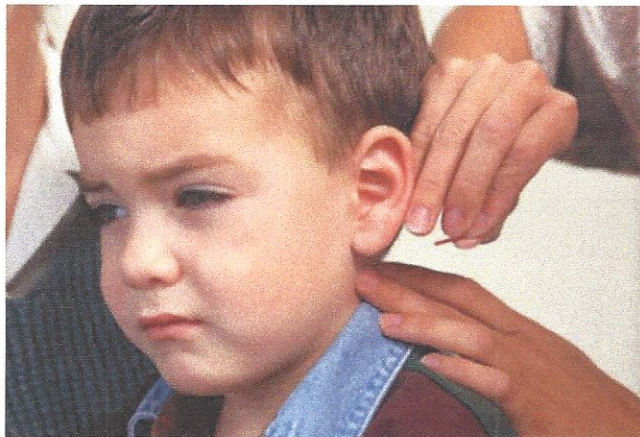
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Acupuncture to Quit Smoking?

Acupuncture has been used for a variety of other conditions, including smoking cessation, insomnia, fatigue, depression, and allergies. The evidence is mixed at best for some uses of acupuncture. For example, acupuncture needles placed in the outer ear to help people stop smoking do not work, studies found.

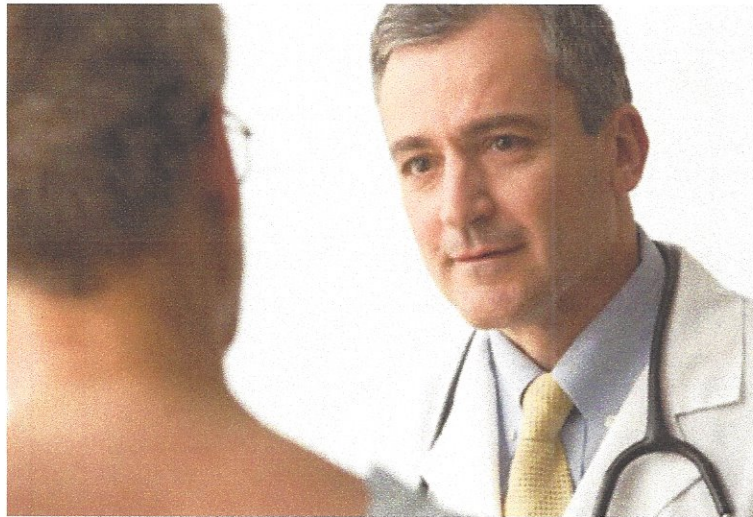
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Acupuncture and Children

Acupuncture is generally considered to be safe for children, as long as you are using a licensed practitioner who follows recommended standards of practice. It is primarily used to control pain or nausea and vomiting after surgery or cancer drug treatment. Scientific evidence does not support the use of acupuncture to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

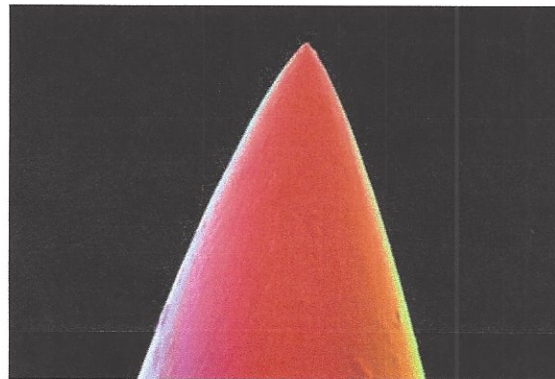
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When to Consider Acupuncture

Because acupuncture rarely causes more than mild side effects, it is a potential alternative to pain medications or steroid treatments. It is also considered a "complementary" medicine that can be used along with other treatments. It is best to discuss the use of acupuncture with your health care provider.

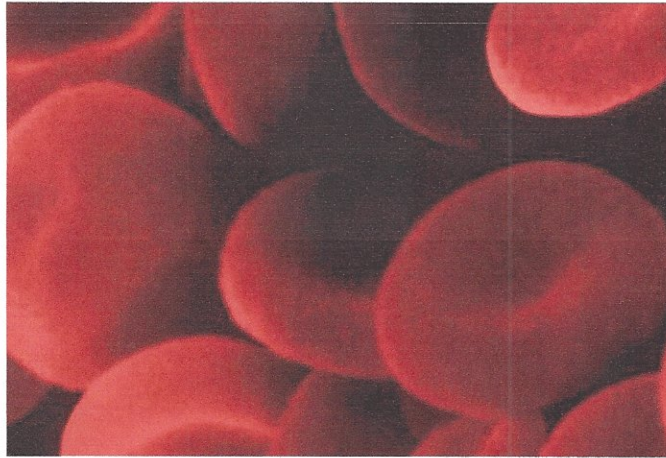
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Acupuncture Risks

Although acupuncture is generally safe and serious problems are rare, there are some risks. Needles that are not sterile can cause infection. Make sure that your practitioner uses sterile needles that are thrown away after one use. In some acupuncture points, needles inserted too deeply can puncture the lungs or gallbladder or cause problems with your blood vessels. That is why it is important to use a practitioner who is well-trained in acupuncture.

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Who Shouldn't Use Acupuncture

People with bleeding disorders or who take blood thinners may have increased risk of bleeding. Electrical stimulation of the needles can cause problems for people with pacemakers or other electrical devices. Pregnant women should talk with their health care provider before having acupuncture. It's important not to skip conventional medical care or rely on acupuncture alone to treat diseases or severe pain.

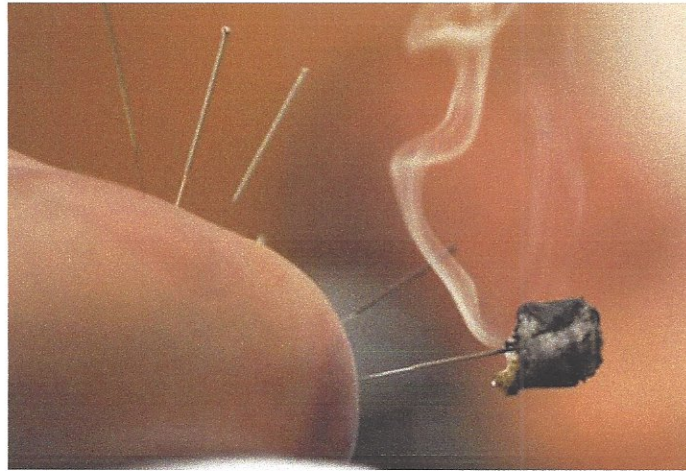
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Choosing a Practitioner

It is important to receive treatment from someone who has met standards for education and training in acupuncture. States vary in their licensing requirements. There are national organizations that maintain standards, such as the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture (a physician group) or the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM).

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Acupuncture Variations

Several other therapies use a different way of stimulating the acupuncture points. Moxibustion involves the burning of moxa, a bundle of dried mugwort and wormwood leaves, which can then be used to heat the acupuncture needles or warm the skin. Electroacupuncture adds electrical stimulation to the needles. Another recent variation uses laser needles that are placed on (but not in) the skin.

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Acupressure vs. Acupuncture

If you are afraid of needles, you may be able to get much of the same effect from acupressure. Acupressure involves pressing or massaging the acupuncture points to stimulate energy pathways. Scientific comparisons of acupressure and acupuncture are limited, but acupressure has been shown to be effective in reducing nausea and lessening labor pain.