

Acupuncture for Pain Relief

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is when thin needles are put into certain places on the body. Acupuncture has been an important part of traditional Chinese medicine for thousands of years.

In modern times, other acupuncture methods have been created. The most common of these is electroacupuncture. This is when mild electrical pulses are passed through the needles into the body. Doctors who treat patients with acupuncture tend to use electroacupuncture more than acupuncturists who are not doctors. Another type of acupuncture called dry needling can be used to treat painful areas in the body called trigger points.

How does acupuncture work?

Doctors are not sure how it works. The traditional explanation is that acupuncture restores the normal flow of energy in the body. Research shows that it can have effects on the nerves, muscles, and brain.

Why do people have acupuncture?

Acupuncture can be used to treat low back pain, neck and shoulder pain, headaches, arthritis, and fibromyalgia.

Does it help?

Many people with a painful condition will feel somewhat or even completely better after acupuncture. Some people do not respond to acupuncture at all, and others do not respond well enough to make it worth the time and cost.

You may need several treatments before you know whether acupuncture will help. If it does help, you will have more treatments until the pain is better. At that point, treatments can be spaced further and further apart. You may need treatments every so often to keep the pain from coming back.

Is acupuncture painful?

Acupuncture needles are very thin and have no cutting edge. This makes them much less painful than needles used to give shots. Once acupuncture needles are in place, you may not feel them, or you might feel only a little ache.

Is acupuncture safe?

Acupuncture is safe, and problems are rare. Some people have minor side effects, such as bruising, headache, or feeling tired. Sometimes the symptoms that acupuncture is treating get worse before they get better.

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <https://familydoctor.org>.

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INFORMATION

from Your Family Doctor

Acupuncture for Pain Relief *(continued)*

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Medical Acupuncture
<http://www.medicalacupuncture.org>

National Certification Commission for
Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
<http://www.nccaom.org/>

National Institutes of Health
<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/acupuncture>

July 2019