

Pain Relief and Acupuncture



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Acupuncture is a healing art, which involves inserting extremely fine needles into very specific points on the body along energy lines called meridians. While no studies completely define how acupuncture works, it's believed that stimulation of these points modifies or eliminates the perception of pain and normalizes physiological functions.

There are several theories that attempt to explain why these needles are so effective. One theory suggests the needle stimulates nerve endings enabling your body to produce chemicals called endorphins and enkephalins. These are natural substances in the body that ease or block pain. Another theory involves the triggering of a chemical cascade, which occurs in the involved tissue after histamine is released at the needle site. A third and newer area of study has identified that the needles actively cause stimulation of brain sites responsible for the region that's painful. Recently, functional MRI's of the brain (MRI's taken that show what's happening in brain tissue at a specific point in time) are showing that areas of the brain specific to a site are often actively engaged when needling for pain – even if the area being treated isn't the site that's painful. For instance, needling the ear acupuncture (auricular acupuncture)

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point for low back pain causes the part of the brain responsible for the low back to become active on a functional MRI.

Western medicine is only now beginning to understand the science behind the needle. Clinically however, acupuncture is one of the oldest forms of treatment for a large variety of ailments. The first textbook on acupuncture, the Yellow Emperor's Text, was written over 2000 years ago, although in its most primitive form, acupuncture has been traced back approximately 5000 years. The Chinese developed the use of metal needles, and their usage dates back to approximately the 16th to 11th centuries B.C.



Dr. Erik Brown and Dr. Lisa Pratt

At this time, acupuncture is practiced widely throughout the U.S. and is recognized by the American Medical Association and the World Health Organization. Unfortunately, acupuncture is still usually a last resort treatment in American medicine. At our clinic, we often treat patients who are still dealing with great amounts of chronic pain after being treated with highly addictive narcotic medications and/or one or more surgeries that have failed. On many occasions, after these patients have garnered significant relief from our treatment, we hear "I wish I had

tried this first." **Many health care professionals feel acupuncture should be a first choice treatment because of its high degree of safety and positive results.**

In recent years, acupuncture has gained popularity. When I first started practicing acupuncture in our community, it wasn't commonly used. Now the media is continuously exploring the benefits of acupuncture. Major sports teams, high school and college athletic directors use acupuncture to promote rapid healing after traditional medical treatment has been administered for strains, sprains and fractures. Acupuncture has even gained a following among seniors for arthritic joint pain.

gize the meridians. With electro-acupuncture, the strength of the stimulation can be changed based on the patient's needs. While electro-acupuncture has been shown to be highly effective with pain management or pain elimination in most patients, there are some patients who require the traditional needle technique. This would include any patients for whom electrical therapies are contra-indicated or for patients being treated for conditions of the head (sinus or eye complaints primarily).

Acupuncture can successfully treat many pain disorders including headaches, peripheral neuropathies, osteoarthritis, sciatica, neck, low back, disc and facet issues and muscular injuries. Acupuncture has also been found to relieve many types of illnesses for which Western medicine doesn't have efficient treatments, such as chronic pain syndromes like fibromyalgia. Those suffering from chronic pain syndromes are often on a number of medications and aren't candidates for additional medications. For these patients, acupuncture can be a viable alternative for pain relief.



Teresa Heaton, office manager and Erika Themely Chiropractic Assistant

Acupuncture is not addictive, non-toxic and has few adverse side effects (needle anxiety and bruising being the most common). For those patients who really can't tolerate the thought of needles, there are needleless forms of acupuncture available that are also effective for pain management.

We use both traditional acupuncture and electro-acupuncture for pain reduction. Electro-acupuncture is the stimulation of the needle with a micro current, which serves to gently ener-

Treatment schedules can vary. Severe acute conditions might require daily care. Mild to moderate chronic conditions might require weekly care. Generally, symptom reduction should occur in the first six to 12 visits with a goal of sustainable pain reduction or pain elimination being the final outcome.

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