

Acupuncture Can Relieve Pain

Pain is one of the most common health complaints of modern day society. In the UK, 80% of Britons will suffer from back pain at some point in their lives (1). When faced with a debilitating problem such as pain, it can be difficult to know which treatment route to follow. Many people use anti-inflammatory pain killers, which can be very effective, but also problematic. Some people may be concerned with addiction, others with the associated health risks such as: internal bleeding, stomach ulcers, nausea, diarrhoea, rashes, headache, dizziness, depression, drowsiness or insomnia (2). Acupuncture can be a safe alternative to prescription drugs and because it treats the cause of the pain, not just the symptoms, it can offer a long-term solution to being pain-free.

Acupuncture has been shown to treat pain effectively. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an entire system of medicine that has been successfully treating injury and illness for thousands of years. Acupuncture is an integral part of that system. In TCM theory, pain is caused by stagnation. Stagnation can be likened to a hosepipe that has a blockage, which causes a build-up of water in the hose. This build up causes pain. By using acupuncture points in the body, it is possible to move the stagnation, and therefore to relieve the pain. TCM acupuncturists also have other methods that they use, like massage, cupping or moxibustion, which are techniques used to relieve not just pain but also many other health problems. For example, moxibustion can be used for correcting breech presentation in unborn babies.

There are several western scientific theories on how acupuncture works, but no one theory explains all the physiological effects acupuncture can have on the body. When talking about pain, the ways in which acupuncture is thought to have an effect are by (3):

- Regulating the nervous system
- Increasing pain tolerance by closing the gating mechanism in the pain signalling system
- Releasing endorphins which in turn reduces pain
- Increasing circulation and relaxing the muscles

The effect that acupuncture has on the body depends on what the person is being treated for; for example, with pain, endorphin release is very relevant. Endorphins help to reduce pain by altering the patient's perception of the sensation, which is similar to the action of prescription medication (4).

In a review of some of the scientific studies on acupuncture, Pomeranz found that acupuncture 'is very effective in treating chronic pain, helping up to 85% of patients.'(5). A study in the USA showed that postoperative pain was significantly reduced in patients receiving acupuncture (6). Research in Sweden about chronic lower back pain showed that not only was there a significant reduction of pain with acupuncture, but that people were more likely to return to work faster and sleep better (7). In Canada, researchers found that acupuncture 'significantly reduced pain, stiffness and physical disability' in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee (8).

One of the important parts of acupuncture is taking a detailed history of the patient's presenting problem and looking for the root cause. The root cause can be due to a person's diet, sedentary lifestyle, stressful environment and/or unbalanced emotional state. Equally, repetitive movements, injury, bad posture or inadequate equipment such as craning one's neck for hours on end to see a computer screen which is too high, can also be contributing or causative factors. This approach to health and well-being promotes a deeper level of understanding into the effect one has on their body and it allows you to be pro-active not only in your recovery from illness, but also in achieving longer lasting health and happiness.

Acupuncture is usually a very enjoyable experience. It normally leaves you feeling relaxed, calm and refreshed. The needles used are incredibly thin and often the patient isn't even aware of the needle going in. Once the needle is in place you often feel a mild tingling or aching sensation. Treatments typically last an hour. Some patients can be treated in 1 or 2 sessions, whilst others may need longer depending on their history and severity of symptoms (a protruding disc will take longer than a strained muscle). For more information about acupuncture, or to see testimonials from people just like you, go to www.lucyjupacupuncture.com.

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