



# All About the Amazing Power Of Acupuncture

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**A**cupuncture is no longer a “fringe” treatment. Since 1997, when it was formally recognized as a legitimate medical technique,\* acupuncture’s uses in Western medicine have been growing. Here’s what it can do for you...

## HOW IT WORKS

Acupuncture involves the insertion of hair-thin needles into one or more of the body’s 2,000-plus acupuncture points. In traditional Chinese medicine, it’s thought that the needles rebalance the flow of energy (*chi*) through 14 major pathways, or meridians. Acupuncture used to be considered questionable because meridians couldn’t be readily identified.

**Fact:** Acupuncture points do exist. Each one is located near a vascular bundle that contains a nerve, artery, vein and lymphatic vessel in the space between muscles. The effects of stimulating specific points have been scientifically verified.

**Example:** One acupuncture point on the foot has traditionally been linked to eye disorders. Brain scans performed at the University of California, Irvine, showed that stimulating that point increased activity in the brain’s occipital region, the area involved with vision.

Acupuncture therapy usually involves a series of six to 12 treatments over a period of weeks or months. Cost per treatment is \$45 to \$150, with the average around \$90. It sometimes is covered by insurance.

It used to be thought that acupuncture provided only short-term relief. In some

\*By the National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Conference.

cases, however, acupuncture appears to permanently alter the way cells function—for example, increasing the ability of nerve cells to release painkilling neurotransmitters. This shows promise for the treatment of chronic conditions, such as osteoarthritis, tendinitis, headaches and irritable bowel syndrome.

The World Health Organization has identified more than 40 conditions that may be helped by acupuncture. The best evidence is for the following conditions...

## BACK PAIN

Many physicians routinely recommend acupuncture for low-back pain, and insurance companies often pay for it. Acupuncture works at least as well as over-the-counter drugs—without causing stomach upset or other side effects.

Acupuncture appears to increase blood supply to injured areas and promote faster healing. It also may encourage the release of painkilling endorphins and stimulate nerve fibers to block pain sensations. Patients with acute back sprains or spasms who are treated with acupuncture in addition to conventional treatments (ice packs, massage, physical therapy, etc.) can ▶

*Bottom Line/Personal* interviewed Gary Kaplan, DO, associate professor of community and family medicine at Georgetown University School of Medicine, and past president of Medical Acupuncture Research Foundation.

He is founder and owner of Kaplan Clinic, Arlington, Virginia, which integrates conventional and family medicine with complementary approaches, such as acupuncture, osteopathic manipulative therapy, homeopathy, nutritional remedies and mind-body medicine. [www.kaplanclinic.com](http://www.kaplanclinic.com)



