



# 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)



▶▶ cut their healing time in half, from an average of about four weeks to two.

### TOOTH EXTRACTION

Patients who have teeth extracted or other oral surgeries experience less post-surgical pain and require lower doses of analgesics when given acupuncture afterward. They also have less swelling and inflammation. In addition to causing an increase in painkilling endorphins, acupuncture lowers levels of *prostaglandins*, inflammatory chemicals that cause nerve and tissue irritation.

### SURGICAL PAIN

Studies have shown that patients given acupuncture during surgery require

lower levels of anesthesia—and have fewer anesthesia-related complications, such as nausea. Acupuncture also can be used postsurgically to help control pain.

### NAUSEA AND VOMITING

More than three dozen randomized controlled studies have shown that acupuncture is effective for treating and preventing nausea and vomiting—important for cancer patients getting chemotherapy. A study of 104 women undergoing high-dose chemotherapy found that those given acupuncture had significantly less nausea and vomiting than those who didn't get the

treatments. Acupuncture also may be helpful for reducing morning sickness during pregnancy.

### PAINFUL MENSTRUATION

A number of studies have shown that women with dysmenorrhea (painful menstrual periods) can get long-lasting relief with acupuncture. In a typical case, a woman might receive several treatments prior to her period, then additional treatments afterward. A total of six to 12 treatments can potentially eliminate the problem for good.

The uterine contractions that result in menstrual cramps are caused by an upsurge in prostaglandins. Acupuncture ▶

▶▶ can calm the nervous system and potentially cause a permanent reduction in prostaglandins.

### ADDICTION

Acupuncture has been used to treat just about every form of addiction—tobacco, alcohol, heroin, etc. It may reduce physical and emotional withdrawal when combined with conventional approaches, such as psychotherapy and medication.

**Example:** Studies have shown that about 60% of addicts drop out of traditional treatment programs, but the dropout rate declines to approximately 40% when acupuncture is included.

### ACUPUNCTURE SAFETY

To get proper treatment...

**Get a diagnosis from a medical doctor** before getting acupuncture treatments. Otherwise you might be misdiagnosed. **Example:** My brother-in-law had a high fever and went to an acupuncturist, who treated him for flu and a urinary tract infection. What he really had was prostatitis with early sepsis, a potentially life-threatening infection that required antibiotic treatment.

**See a qualified acupuncturist—** either a medical acupuncturist (MD or DO), a practitioner who is a member of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture (AAMA, 323-937-5514, [www.medicalacupuncture.org](http://www.medicalacupuncture.org)) or one who is board-certified by the American Board of Medical Acupuncture, an independent entity within the AAMA...or a licensed acupuncturist, a practitioner who has completed the state or national exams conducted by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM, 703-548-9004, [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org)).

**Ask how many treatments will be needed.** If it's more than 12 or the practitioner won't be specific, get a second opinion.

**Avoid acupuncture if you are taking anticoagulant medications,** such as *coumadin* or *heparin*, or if you have a bleeding disorder (such as hemophilia). ■ ■

Bottom Line PERSONAL 