



ACUPUNCTURE

Also Known As:

Auricular Acupuncture, Chinese Acupuncture, Ear Acupuncture, Foot Acupuncture, Hand Acupuncture, Japanese Acupuncture, Korean Acupuncture, Needle Moxibustion, Single Point Acupuncture, Trigger Point Acupuncture, Western Acupuncture.

Scientific Name:

None.

People Use This For:

Acupuncture is used for pain, neuropathy, low back pain, labor pain, temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ), migraine headache, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. It is also used for schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), stroke, enuresis, incontinence, xerostomia, and many other conditions.

Safety:

LIKELY SAFE ...when used appropriately. Acupuncture has been safely used in numerous clinical trials (15990, 15991, 15992, 15993, 15994, 15995, 15996, 15997, 15998, 15999, 16000) (16001, 16002, 16003, 16004).
PREGNANCY AND LACTATION: POSSIBLY SAFE ...when used appropriately. Some clinical research shows that acupuncture has been used during pregnancy and labor without significant adverse effects (15991).

Effectiveness:

LIKELY EFFECTIVE

Back pain. An analysis of multiple clinical trials shows that acupuncture consistently reduces pain compared to sham treatment, or no treatment, in patients with chronic low back pain (15994); however, there is no reliable evidence that acupuncture is more effective than other treatments for low back pain.

POSSIBLY EFFECTIVE

Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. An analysis of clinical trials shows that acupuncture point stimulation in combination with conventional antiemetics can significantly reduce the occurrence of acute vomiting compared to antiemetics alone. However, acupuncture does not reduce acute or delayed nausea (16002).

Labor pain. An analysis of clinical trials shows that pregnant women receiving acupuncture during labor have a decreased need for pain relief compared to those receiving sham treatment (15991).

Osteoarthritis. An analysis of clinical trials shows that acupuncture significantly reduces pain in patients with osteoarthritis of the knee compared to sham treatment (16004).

INSUFFICIENT RELIABLE EVIDENCE to RATE

Cancer-related pain. Preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture can reduce pain in patients with cancer-related pain (15993).

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture can decrease dyspnea and improve 6 minute walk in patients with COPD (15993).

Cocaine dependence. An analysis of preliminary clinical research shows that auricular (ear) acupuncture is no more effective than sham treatment for reducing cocaine use in cocaine dependent patients (16001).

Depression. An analysis of preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture can reduce symptoms of depression in patients with mild-to-moderate depression compared to sham treatment. In studies comparing acupuncture to conventional drug therapy, there were no significant differences between treatments (15996); however, poor study methodology and the small number of patients enrolled in the trials limits the reliability of these findings.

Enuresis. Preliminary clinical research suggests that acupuncture might help decrease nocturnal enuresis in children compared to sham treatment (15997).

Schizophrenia. An analysis of preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture, plus conventional antipsychotic drug therapy, might improve some symptoms of schizophrenia (15999); however, poor study methodology and the small number of patients enrolled in the trials limits the reliability of these findings.

Shoulder pain. Preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture can significantly reduce shoulder pain in spinal cord injury patients who use wheelchairs; however, there was a high placebo response and acupuncture was not significantly more effective than sham treatment (15990, 15998).

Smoking cessation. An analysis of preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture does not significantly improve long-term smoking cessation rates compared to sham treatment (16000).

Stroke. An analysis of preliminary clinical research shows that acupuncture following an ischemic stroke is associated with a modestly reduced risk of death, dependency, and institutional care after 3 months compared to sham treatment (15995). The effect of acupuncture on stroke rehabilitation is inconsistent and unclear (16003). Poor study methodology and the small number of patients enrolled in the trials limits the reliability of these findings.

Temporomandibular joint dysfunction (TMJ). An analysis of preliminary clinical trials shows that acupuncture can significantly reduce pain and other symptoms of TMJ; however, none of these trials adequately controlled for placebo response (15992).

More evidence is needed to rate acupuncture for these uses.

Mechanism of Action:

Acupuncture is a primary treatment modality of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Acupuncture treatment involves inserting fine needles into specific parts or points on the body along pathways called "meridians." The purpose is to stimulate points that correspond to specific organs, emotions, or sensory feelings. For example, acupuncture around the ear, feet, and hands targets the pain of labor (15991).

In traditional Chinese medicine, it is thought that disease is caused by an imbalanced or blocked flow of energy or "qi." Therefore, acupuncture is thought to stimulate energy flow, unblock energy, and rebalance energy, which results in healing (15996).

Most acupuncture points are located near nervous tissue or structures. Researchers suggest that insertion of an acupuncture needle at these points may block transmission of pain signals through certain neural gates (15991).

Some experts also theorize that acupuncture might result in the release of endorphins and/or opioids, which naturally reduce pain (15991).

For depression and other psychiatric conditions, acupuncture is thought to stimulate neurotransmitters. It is thought that acupuncture might increase synthesis and release of serotonin and norepinephrine (15996).

Adverse Reactions:

Acupuncture, when used appropriately, is generally well-tolerated. Side effects can occur, but are rare. They can include dizziness, nausea and vomiting, pain, fainting, and infection of the needle insertion points (15995, 15996).

Interactions with Herbs & Supplements:

None known.

Interactions with Drugs:

None known.

Interactions with Foods:

None known.

Interactions with Lab Tests:

None known.

Interactions with Diseases or Conditions:

None known.

Dosage/Administration:

None.

Editor's Comments:

Acupuncture is an ancient practice that originated in China as a component of traditional Chinese medicine.

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