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Good Reasons to Try Acupuncture

Thousands of Studies Show Healing Results

by Kathleen Barnes

The ancient Chinese art of acupuncture is gaining popularity in modern Western medicine for many reasons. "There's lots of research to support the effectiveness of acupuncture for a wide variety of conditions," says Thomas Burgoon, a medical doctor who practices internal medicine in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and is president of the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture, an association of doctors of medicine and osteopathic medicine that use acupuncture in conjunction with conventional treatments.

Acupuncture treatments typically involve the nearly painless insertion of very thin needles to stimulate the body's natural repair and regulation mechanisms based on the fundamental Chinese medicine principle that the inside of the body can often be treated from the outside. Burgoon explains that acupuncture works by stimulating and releasing the body's natural pain relievers, including endorphins, producing the feel-good brain

chemical serotonin and relieving inflammation, as well as bringing many other body processes into normal function.

Brevard, North Carolina, licensed master acupuncturist Paul Buchman, adds, "Acupuncture differs from conventional Western medicine in many ways, primarily in that when it treats a disease on the physical level, it also has far-reaching effects on our mental, emotional and spiritual aspects."

Chronic back pain: Chronic low back pain affects 80 percent of us at some time and is the second-most

common cause of disability in American adults, according to a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

A recent study of Australian patients arriving in Melbourne hospital emergency rooms complaining of low back pain found that those treated with acupuncture experienced as much pain relief in an hour as those given drugs.

The U.S. Library of Medicine database lists more than 23,000 studies on acupuncture.

"When I treat a person for low back pain, I always take pulses in several parts of the body, and then take into account many factors, including age, gender and life

situation," says Buchman. "The underlying causes of the pain may be different in a 20-something student with a stressful academic load than a 50-something woman that's a recent empty nester redefining her future," he explains.

When researchers at China's Central South University reviewed 13 studies on acupuncture and low back pain, they concluded that comprehensive treatment plans that involve acupuncture are urgently needed.

Headache: Acupuncture has long been used to relieve the pain of migraines and tension headaches. Australian research published in *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* found that 16 acupuncture sessions cut in half the number of days that patients experienced migraines, significantly reducing pain.

"Acupuncture is a must-try therapy for anyone with migraines or chronic or tension-type headaches," says Burgoon. He notes that Aetna Insurance Company policy considers acupuncture among accepted, medically necessary treatments for migraines, chronic low back pain, knee osteoarthritis, postoperative dental pain and nausea associated with surgery, pregnancy and chemotherapy.

Asthma and allergies: More than 25 million Americans have asthma, including 6.8 million children. Danish research published in the journal *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* showed that 10 acupuncture sessions given over a three-month period reduced asthma symptoms and use of inhaled steroids, but only when acupuncture was ongoing. Benefits diminished when treatments were discontinued. German researchers at Berlin's Charité University Medical Center found similar effects for seasonal allergies by comparing it with the effects of antihistamines and sham acupuncture.

"Patterns of bad health get more ingrained in our body systems as we get older," says Melanie Katin, a licensed acupuncturist specializing in treating children in New York City and professor

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at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine. "If we can catch an illness in a child's first seven or eight years, we may be able to prevent it from becoming chronic in adulthood."

Digestive problems: Acupuncture has been found to be effective for treating colic in babies, irritable bowel syndrome, morning sickness and post-operative nausea caused by anesthesia and chemotherapy treatments, verified in research from Australia's University of Sydney on patients after surgery for metastatic liver cancer. Several other studies, including one from the Milwaukee's Medical College of Wisconsin, show that acupuncture rebalances the nervous system and restores proper digestive function, while relieving pain.

The World Health Organization review of research notes how acupuncture relieved gastrointestinal (GI) spasms better than atropine injections, and also recommends acupuncture for relief of nausea. "Acupuncture helps calm down an overactive GI tract and stimulates an underactive one," explains Burgoon.

Acupuncture is a non-pharmaceutical remedy for many health problems, Burgoon says. "I fell in love with acupuncture when I discovered I could use it to treat some problems that nothing else helped. I almost never prescribe any medications. Instead, I help people get off pharmaceuticals."

Kathleen Barnes is author of many natural health books, including The Calcium Lie 2: What Your Doctor Still Doesn't Know, with Dr. Robert Thompson. Connect at KathleenBarnes.com.



No Needles Needed for Kids

by Kathleen Barnes

Acupuncture can be helpful for children, especially in treating asthma, allergies and childhood digestive disorders, including colic, says Melanie Katin, a licensed acupuncturist who specializes in treating children in New York City.

"Acupuncture for children rarely involves the use of needles. Since their *qi* (life force) flows very close to the surface of their skin, it doesn't require a lot of movement to get things flowing in the right direction," she explains.

Acupuncture for kids typically involves light, fast brushing of the skin to encourage a healing circulation of energy. Katin teaches parents to continue treatments at home. She explains that it's still technically acupuncture, not acupressure, which would involve prolonged stimulation of the body's energy meridian sites. Sometimes she includes the use of small instruments for tapping or brushing the skin and tuning forks to stimulate the meridian points. She remarks, "The kids love it."

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