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6 Health Benefits Of Acupuncture Therapy

## 6 Science-Based Benefits Of Acupuncture

Research shows acupuncture therapy can be an effective alternative treatment for everything from headaches to obesity

By Emily Main for RodaleNews.com

### How acupuncture improves your health

Has your doctor ever prescribed you a round of acupuncture? Probably not. Alternative treatments often get short shrift in standard healthcare because doctors are generally unaware of the science showing that they really are effective alternatives to drugs and medication. But a new study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* may (hopefully) change that.

The researchers pooled data from nearly 18,000 people who had participated in studies examining the effectiveness of acupuncture and found that, yes, it really is a good treatment for chronic pain and that doctors should start recommending it as treatment for arthritis and other chronic ailments.

Chronic pain is certainly one of the most common reasons people seek out acupuncturists, but **here are six other scientifically studied ways that acupuncture therapy can alleviate what's bothering you.**

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#### 1. Eases your aching back

Using acupuncture therapy to successfully relieve chronic back pain is well documented in scientific literature, and acupuncturists say that it's the leading reason that people visit their clinics. A study published in May's issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* even found that people who were given "simulated acupuncture," where pressure was placed on certain acupuncture points but no needles were actually used, saw as much as a 15% greater improvement in their symptoms (equal to the improvements seen in people who were receiving true acupuncture) than people who were taking medications and undergoing standard chiropractic care.

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#### 2. Boosts the effectiveness of meds

A study from China, published in the August issue of the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* found that a low-dose of fluoxetine (Prozac) combined with acupuncture therapy was just as effective at reducing anxiety in patients being treated for depression as full-dose medication. Cutting the dose and adding acupuncture also reduced the drug's side effects, which can include nausea, weight gain, and a decreased sex drive.

#### 3. Soothes indigestion

Brazilian researchers recently published research finding that acupuncture therapy alleviated heartburn and indigestion in pregnant women. One group of pregnant women was given a combination of acupuncture and medications, and another group was counseled on dietary changes and given medications if needed. Over the course of the study, 75% of the women in the acupuncture group saw heartburn intensity, and antacid use, decline, while only 44% of women in the standard-treatment group saw those same effects.

#### 4. Counteracts radiation side effects

Cancer patients undergoing radiation treatment are likely to suffer a variety of side effects, depending on the part of the body being treated. However, acupuncture therapy has been found

to have some effect on the perception of how bad those effects can be, particularly for nausea and dry mouth, common in patients receiving radiation to the head and neck. A review of studies published in *CA*, a journal of the American Cancer Society, found that people undergoing radiation treatment perceived fewer negative side effects of radiation even though the side effects may still be there. For instance, in one study, patients who wore acupressure bands during treatment said they felt less nausea, although they still had the same occurrence of vomiting as they did before wearing the band, and in another study, people said they had less of a problem with dry mouth, even though measures of their saliva showed that levels remained the same. The acupuncture didn't actually alleviate the symptoms, but it did help improve patients' quality of life after treatment.

#### **5. Dulls persistent headaches**

A review of 22 studies involving acupuncture therapy, migraines, and tension headaches found that regular acupuncture therapy was effective at preventing tension headaches and migraines from becoming a problem, and that it was an effective treatment for existing headaches.

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#### **6. Ends obesity?**

The influence of acupuncture therapy on obesity isn't as well-documented as the other examples we've listed, but there's enough evidence to suggest that it could be an effective weight-loss treatment. Researchers from Korea analyzed 31 studies on a total of 3,013 people, and found that acupuncture therapy led to greater decreases in body weight than lifestyle changes or medications. However, they note in their findings, published February in the journal *Obesity*, that flaws in many of the studies made it difficult to see how effective acupuncture therapy would be on obesity in the long run. But for people willing to try it, adding a weekly acupuncture session to daily exercise and a smart diet could lead to healthy gains.

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