

# PAINS AND NEEDLES

## GOOD POINTS TO KNOW ABOUT ACUPUNCTURE



ACUPUNCTURE WAS FOUND TO PROVIDE IMMEDIATE PAIN REDUCTION IN PATIENTS WITH FROZEN SHOULDER, OR ADHESIVE CAPSULITIS.

- study published in the journal Pain Medicine in 2017

Who would have thought that sticking a needle into one part of your body could reduce pain in another part? But that is how acupuncture works. And more and more published research is proving that acupuncture really works.

Physiotherapists with specific acupuncture training and certification use acupuncture to treat many conditions – from a painful knee, back or shoulder to conditions like fibromyalgia.

In a study published in the journal Pain Medicine in 2017, acupuncture was found to provide immediate pain reduction in patients with frozen shoulder, or adhesive capsulitis. Frozen shoulder is a common disorder associated with severe pain in its initial two stages accompanied by significantly reduced joint mobility. This condition can last more than 20 months. In this first double-blinded study, distal acupuncture points (far away from the painful shoulder) were used. This is a perfect example of how placing a needle away from the painful area works!

## HOW DOES ACUPUNCTURE ACTUALLY WORK?

Acupuncture is an ancient, safe and effective alternative to medication and, in some cases, surgery. Acupuncture stimulates the balance and flow of Qi energy that in traditional Chinese medicine is considered essential to health. When the body is healthy, Qi (pronounce Chee), flows smoothly through the meridians that make up a conceptual network of pathways throughout the entire body. When the balance or flow of Qi is deficient or obstructed in the body, this may lead to illness. Acupuncture treats both the symptoms and the root cause of the patient's illness. Western scientists have been studying the mechanisms by which acupuncture works. They explain that acupuncture stimulates the release of endorphins — the body's natural pain-relieving neuro-hormones — through the insertion of needles into specific anatomical points (acupuncture points) to encourage healing. Therapeutic effects of acupuncture include pain relief, increased energy, improved mood and improved body function.

## WHAT HEALTH CONDITIONS DOES ACUPUNCTURE HELP?

There has been significant research on the use of acupuncture in treating pain. A review of research published in the American Journal of Chinese Medicine on the effects of electroacupuncture (stimulation of pairs of acupuncture needles with mild electrical pulses) on knee osteoarthritis showed that electroacupuncture has more significant advantage for relieving pain and improving function than pharmacological treatments. This review of 11 randomized controlled trials published in 2017 indicates that electroacupuncture has had considerable clinical effects in the treatment of knee osteoarthritis with no serious adverse effects.

The incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions. As an example, musculoskeletal conditions, such as fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, and tennis elbow, or epicondylitis are conditions for which acupuncture may be beneficial. These painful conditions are often treated with, among other things, anti-inflammatory medications (aspirin, ibuprofen, etc.) or with steroid injections or perhaps even opioids. These medical interventions have a potential for deleterious side effects but are still widely used and are considered acceptable treatments. The evidence supporting these therapies is no better than that for acupuncture. In the case of opioids, addiction issues are well known, and acupuncture may have a role to play as a valuable alternative to such medications.

Whether you have a recent or more chronic problem, acupuncture can be an excellent treatment option. A physiotherapist will perform a thorough assessment and determine a treatment plan specific to your needs. In addition to acupuncture treatment, your therapist will incorporate additional treatment approaches such as active exercises, manual therapy or education about your condition. This holistic approach will help you to more fully resolve your injury or maximize your functional capacity.

Sheila Williams is a physiotherapist certified in acupuncture at Markham Physiotherapy. You can find Sheila and many great, acupuncture-certified physiotherapists in the Find A Physiotherapist section at [www.mbphysio.org](http://www.mbphysio.org).



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