



ACUPUNCTURE: “EXCELLENT RELIEF” for BACK PAIN and SCIATICA

Back pain and sciatica are two of the most common reasons people see a health care provider. It has been estimated that up to 80% of people will suffer from either acute or chronic back pain at some point in their lives. Common causes of back pain and sciatica include: ligament sprain, muscle strain, muscle spasm, piriformis syndrome, osteoarthritis, facet joint irritation, sacroiliac joint pain, lumbar or thoracic disc degeneration (DJD), disc bulge or herniation, spondylolysis, spondylolisthesis, spinal stenosis, pregnancy and fibromyalgia.

Patients with back pain have many options for treatment including medication, chiropractic, physical therapy, injections, back exercises and even surgery. However, these treatments do not always help and some may actually aggravate or irreversibly worsen the condition. Recent studies show that acupuncture is proving to be the most effective, safest, side effect free, and cost effective treatment for back problems!

The results of a long term study published in a 2001 issue of the Clinical Journal of Pain (December 2001 - Volume 17 - Issue 4 - pp 296-305) provides scientific evidence and further proof that acupuncture is a safe and effective procedure for low-back pain, and that it can maintain positive outcomes for periods of six months or longer without producing the negative side-effects that often accompany more traditional pain remedies.

In controlled clinical studies acupuncture patients also experienced less episodes of sleep disturbance due to pain. Research also reported that sleep patterns were "significantly less disturbed after the treatment period" in the acupuncture group, but that there was "no significant difference in sleep disturbance" in the placebo patients. Patients undergoing acupuncture also displayed increased activity and productivity levels and less time missed from work.

Finally, total intake of pain relieving medications dropped dramatically in the acupuncture group, but not the placebo group. At the start of the study, patients in the acupuncture group consumed an average of 31 pills per week; while those in the placebo group consumed an average of 23 pills. At the six-month follow-up, the number of pills taken by placebo patients remained almost identical, but had dropped more than 28% to 21.4 pills per week in acupuncture patients.

There are both Eastern and Western philosophies explaining how acupuncture works to relieve pain and relax tight, spastic muscles and tendons.

The Eastern theory of how Acupuncture works is rooted in the belief that a life force or "energy", which is called Qi (pronounced chee), flows through the body. This energy can be directly influenced and regulated by stimulating specific acu-points on the body. These acu-points are located along lines of energy called channels or meridians. According to Eastern medical theory, illness arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes imbalanced by either stagnation or deficiency. Many of these points are found on the back of the body and are stimulated during the treatment to improve the flow of energy (Qi) in the areas of

stagnation. The saying “pain goes, when the energy flows” is an easy way to understand this concept.

From a Western standpoint, acupuncture can be viewed as providing a gentle internal massage to the underlying tissues. The thin acupuncture needle can penetrate deeply when needed (often only superficial insertion is required) and affect deep muscles and tendons not always accessible by massage, TENS units, ultrasound, heat or stretching. The needles enhance blood circulation and decrease muscle tension in the areas of pain or discomfort without further aggravating the tissue as is sometimes the case with massage or manipulation. When circulation in the tissue improves, muscle relaxation occurs followed by a reduction in pain levels. In some cases, however, the pain in the affected area occasionally intensifies slightly due to the increased pressure brought on by the heightened blood flow. This effect lasts only several hours to one or two days but is then quickly followed by decreased pain and inflammation, muscle relaxation and tissue healing.

Acupuncture needles can also treat many problem areas at once thus maximizing the time and efficiency of the therapeutic experience. For example: in a typical session I can treat the neck, upper and lower back, hips, buttocks and legs all at the same time and the needles can be left in place for 20-45 minutes! Many other therapies can only treat one area at a time and typically only for several minutes each. It is due to this “total body” coverage and length of therapy that acupuncture treatments have a much longer “holding” or effective period than other modalities.

Scientific studies also understand that acupuncture stimulates the pituitary gland that is responsible for synthesizing many important hormones as well as endorphins. It is estimated that endorphins are over 100 times more potent than morphine and are considered the body's natural pain-killing hormones. Acupuncture is proven to cause the release of these natural pain relieving endorphins which in turn decrease pain and inflammation and thus allow new blood to flush the injured area and facilitate natural healing.

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