

Medical Acupuncture

- ◆ 'Medical Acupuncture' refers to the use of acupuncture needling as a therapeutic technique following an orthodox diagnosis. This is not the same approach as traditional Chinese acupuncture.
- ◆ Acupuncture needling appears to work by stimulating certain nerves in muscle and other tissues. The activity in these nerves affects the processing of pain and other sensations in the spinal cord.
- ◆ There is also release of substances from the nerve endings in the tissues, which can promote healing and repair.

In terms of back pain, acupuncture can release tight and painful muscles, and can reduce the pain felt from some of the joints and tissues of the spine. It may promote healing and repair in some circumstances.

How is this therapy given - what happens during treatment?

The medical acupuncture practitioner, following or during an orthodox assessment, examines the relevant parts of the spine and surrounding tissues for tenderness and for 'trigger points'. Trigger points are tender spots in tight bands, or "knots" in muscle, which can often be the prime source of a patient's pain. Trigger points, tender points and classical acupuncture points are chosen for treatment. Fine needles are inserted to the appropriate depth and stimulated or left in place for anything from a few seconds to half an hour. The patient may feel something like 'their pain' being mimicked by the needles, or may simply feel a gentle ache or warmth around the points treated.

What is the evidence?

There is some evidence that chronic low back pain and fibromyalgia can be helped by acupuncture, although it is not conclusive.

What back conditions is it most likely to help?

Muscle strains or spasm, chronic low back pain, fibromyalgia.

Back pain that is:

- ◆ Confined to one side
- ◆ Dull or aching in nature

What back conditions is it least likely to help?

Back pain derived principally from irritation of spinal nerves, such as occurs in spinal stenosis, vertebral collapse in patients with severe osteoporosis, and, in extreme cases, of prolapsed intervertebral discs.

Back pain that is:

- ◆ Midline or symmetrical
- ◆ Stabbing or shooting in nature

What back conditions should not be treated with this therapy?

There are no back conditions that must be avoided, but acupuncture should only be used after an orthodox diagnostic assessment, so that definitive or more appropriate treatment is not delayed.

Association

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Qualifications

Acupuncture, although unregulated, is practised by some conventionally qualified medical doctors. The British Medical Acupuncture Society runs courses for medically qualified people. You may feel more confident with someone qualified in both orthodox and complementary approaches.

Accredited members of the BMAS are registered medical practitioners (i.e., doctors) who have obtained the diploma in medical acupuncture.

Relevant Information

- BackCare Factsheets - TENS Pain Relief
- BackCare Booklets - Basic Back Care, Managing Back Pain
- Other Publications – “Back & Neck Pain – the Facts” by Loic Burn, available from BackCare