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## Alleviate Arthritis Pain with Acupuncture

Arthritis isn't just one disease, but a complex disorder comprised of more than 100 distinct conditions that can affect people at any stage of life. Two of the most common forms are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. While these two types of arthritis have very different causes, risk factors and effects on the body, they often share a common symptom: persistent joint pain.



For many people, arthritis pain and inflammation cannot be avoided as the body ages. In fact, most people over the age of 50 show some signs of arthritis as joints naturally degenerate over time. Fortunately, arthritis can frequently be managed with acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis, affecting an estimated 21 million adults in the United States. Beginning with the breakdown of joint cartilage that results in pain and stiffness, osteoarthritis usually affects the joints of the fingers, knees, hips and spine. The wrists, elbows, shoulders and ankles are less frequently affected and when osteoarthritis is found in these joints, there is typically a history of injury or unusual stress to the joints. This may include and be attributed to work-related repetitive injury and physical trauma. For example, if you have a strenuous job that requires repetitive bending, kneeling or squatting, you may be at high risk for osteoarthritis of the knee.

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect many different joints and, in some people, other parts of the body as well, including the blood vessels, lungs and heart. With this kind of arthritis, inflammation of the joint lining (called the synovium) can cause pain, stiffness, swelling, warmth and redness. The impacted joint may also lose its shape, resulting in loss of normal movement. Rheumatoid arthritis is characterized by flares (active symptoms) and remissions (few to no symptoms).

### Diagnosis and Treatment of Arthritis with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

According to Oriental medical theory, arthritis arises when the cyclical flow of Qi (energy) in the meridians becomes blocked resulting in pain, soreness, numbness and stiffness. This blockage is called "bi syndrome" and is widely studied and successfully treated using a combination of treatment modalities. The acupuncture points and herbs that are used depend on whether the underlying cause of the blockage of Qi (arthritis) is caused by wind, cold, damp or damp-heat.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine aim to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual using a variety of techniques such as acupuncture, bodywork,

**The Arthritis Foundation recommends the following to reduce the impact of arthritis:**

**Get Active** - Regular physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones,

muscles and joints. Tai Chi is a Chinese



exercise that strengthens muscles, improves balance and flexibility, promotes relaxation, and has been shown to relieve chronic joint pain.

**Control Weight** - Maintaining an appropriate weight or reducing weight to a recommended level reduces the risk of osteoarthritis. Losing just 10 pounds relieves 40 pounds of pressure on knees. For those living with symptoms, losing 15 pounds can cut knee pain in half.

**Modify Job Tasks** - Try to modify your movements, since repeated use of joints

lifestyle/dietary recommendations and energetic exercises to restore imbalances found in the body. Therefore, if 10 patients are treated with Oriental medicine for joint pain, each of these 10 patients will receive a unique, customized treatment with different acupuncture points, different herbs/supplements, and different lifestyle and diet recommendations.

## Studies of Acupuncture for Arthritis

Scientists found that acupuncture can reduce pain and improve mobility in arthritis patients by 40 percent based on results from a major clinical trial that investigated the ancient Chinese needle treatment. A total of 570 patients aged 50 and older with osteoarthritis of the knee took part in the American study. All had suffered significant pain in their knee the month before joining the trial, but had never experienced acupuncture. By the eighth week, patients receiving acupuncture treatments showed a significant increase in function compared with both the "placebo" treatment and self-help groups. By week 14, they were also experiencing a major decrease in pain.

In a German study, 3,500 people with osteoarthritis of the hip and/or knee received 15 sessions of acupuncture combined with their usual medical care. The results showed that the patients that received acupuncture had less pain and stiffness, improved joint function and better quality of life than their counterparts who had routine care alone. The improvements occurred immediately after completing a three-month course of acupuncture and lasted for at least another three months, indicating osteoarthritis is among conditions effectively treated with acupuncture.

Another study, published in the journal *Pain*, looked at the effects of acupuncture among 40 adults with osteoarthritis of the knee. Among the patients in the study, those who had a daily acupuncture session for 10 consecutive days reported greater relief of pain compared to patients who received a "placebo" version of the therapy.

In one Scandinavian study, 25 percent of arthritis patients who had been scheduled for knee surgery cancelled their operations after acupuncture treatment. In the study, researchers compared acupuncture with advice and exercise for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the hip. Thirty-two patients awaiting a total hip replacement were separated into two groups. One group received one 10-minute and five 25-minute sessions of acupuncture, and the other group received advice and hip exercises over a 6-week period. Patients were then assessed for pain and functional ability. Patients in the acupuncture group showed vast improvements, while no significant changes were reported in the group that received advice and exercise therapy. The results of this study indicate that acupuncture is more effective than advice and exercise for the treatment of osteoarthritis of the hip.

A University of Maryland School of Medicine study showed that elderly patients who had knee pain due to arthritis improved considerably when acupuncture was added to their treatment. The randomized clinical trial determined whether acupuncture was a clinically safe and effective adjunctive therapy for older patients with osteoarthritis of the knee. The study addressed the addition of acupuncture to conventional therapy to determine if it would provide an added measure of pain relief, if the effects would last beyond treatment and if treatment would have any side effects. Seventy-three patients were randomly divided into two groups. One group received twice-weekly acupuncture treatments and conventional therapy for eight weeks, and the other group received conventional therapy only. Patients who received acupuncture had notable pain relief and showed improvement in function. Those who did not receive acupuncture showed no substantial change. No patients reported negative side effects from any acupuncture therapy session.

in jobs that require bending and lifting is associated with an increased risk of developing osteoarthritis.

Speak with a health care professional about ways to reduce strain on your joints.

## Anti-Inflammatory Foods

A balanced, varied diet can help ease the pain of arthritis. Avoiding "damp" foods, such as dairy products and greasy or spicy fare, also helps joints.

**Ginger** - Ginger is a natural anti-inflammatory. A fresh ginger tea can be made by combining a half teaspoon of grated ginger with 8 ounces of boiling water. Cover and steep for 10 to 15 minutes, then strain and add honey to taste.

**Fresh Pineapple** - Bromelain, an enzyme in pineapple, reduces inflammation. Be sure the pineapple is fresh, not canned or frozen.

**Cherries** - Tart cherries are an excellent source of nutrients that may help to reduce joint pain and inflammation related to arthritis.

**Fish** - Cold-water fish, such as salmon and mackerel, contain omega-3 fatty acids, which help keep joints healthy as well as reduce pain and swelling.

**Turmeric** - A natural anti-inflammatory, it can be used in many food preparations including soups, sauces and salad dressings.

