ACUPUNCTURE TODAY

by Elaine Moore

A recent study at Mayo Clinic confirmed that acupuncture improves fibromyalgia. Other studies show that acupuncture elicits multiple benefits for patients with various autoimmune disorders.

What is Acupuncture?

A recent study from Mayo Clinic showing that acupuncture reduces symptoms of fibromyalgia has brought more awareness to its benefits. Acupuncture is a treatment method that has been practiced for more than 5,000 years in China and other Asian countries. Acupuncture treats disease through the application of fine, thin needles applied in specific locations known as acupoints corresponding with the body's energy paths, which directly affect related organs.

In the past decade, Eastern Medicine has shown a renewed interest in acupuncture. With more than 10,000 articles on acupuncture found on the Library of Medicine's website, the documented benefits of acupuncture include: reduction of pain, improvement in fatigue, improvement in fibromyalgia, headaches, and nausea, successful treatment of obesity, reduced pain and improved function in arthritis, and successful treatment of infertility.

Fibromyalgia and Acupuncture

Fibromyalgia is a potentially disabling disorder suspected of having an autoimmune origin that is characterized by chronic, widespread musculoskeletal pain. Accompanying symptoms include fatigue, joint stiffness and sleep disturbances.

Researchers at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota studied 50 fibromyalgia patients who were enrolled in a randomized, controlled acupuncture trial. Subjects received 6 treatments over a three-week period. According to the June 2006 issue of Mayo Clinic Proceedings, symptoms of patients who received acupuncture significantly improved compared with the control group. Researchers concluded that their study lends credence to patients' belief that nontraditional methods may improve their health. In the trial, the patients who received acupuncture reported improvement in fatigue and anxiety and a reduction in pain. Dr. David Martin, lead researcher, speculated that, "Acupuncture needles may trigger the patient's nervous system to respond in ways that improve the underlying hypersensitivity that causes fibromyalgia symptoms."

Evaluating the Benefits

Western scientists theorize that acupuncture stimulates the production of immune-system cells and painkilling "feel-good" endorphins, similar to the immune system and neuroendocrine changes seen in vigorous exercise, such as long distance running. Studies also suggest that acupuncture alters the release pattern of brain chemicals such as
neurotransmitters and neurohormones. These chemicals, in turn, affect the central nervous system, reducing pain and improving wellbeing.

The National Institutes of Health is currently sponsoring approximately 50 trials in the recruitment stage that will examine acupuncture in the treatment of hypertension, osteoarthritis, chronic pain, depression, and other conditions. To date improvement has been seen in fibromyalgia, migraines and headaches, obesity and chronic pain syndromes.

**Finding a Practitioner**


**Resources:**

- Acupuncture Relieves Fibromyalgia Symptoms, InFocus, Publication of the Autoimmune and Related Disorders Association, vol 14(4), December 2006.
- Clinical Trials at www.clinicaltrials.gov