



Research shows acupuncture beneficial for migraine sufferers 13.04.2007

Over a lifetime, only 1% of the UK population escape headaches altogether. Over a year, it is estimated that 90% of the population get at least 1 headache. About 16-17% of the population get a migraine headache sometime in their life - that means over a billion people worldwide at some point experience migraine. It is a growing and ever-present problem, often exacerbated by the stresses of modern living.

A migraine is a headache involving recurrent attacks that can last up to three days. Sufferers may also experience double vision, nausea and vomiting. Headaches are usually one sided and often pain occurs in the temple area. Migraines are often thought to be caused by emotional strain, stress, hormonal imbalances, lack of food and/or sleep or by a reaction to some foods or medications, like the Pill. Conventional medicine often fails to provide sufficient pain relief for many people.

How can acupuncture help?

Migraine sufferers often have lower levels of endorphins (natural pain killers) and acupuncture can work to return levels of these hormones to normal. Increased levels of these substances are associated with headache improvement. When released, endorphins will act to inhibit the perception of pain. They also help control the action of the nervous system to affect both the blood circulation to the head and other symptoms such as nausea.

Traditional Chinese philosophy states that our health is dependent on the body's motivating energy, known as qi, moving in a smooth and balanced way through a series of channels beneath the skin.

It also states that pain is caused by stagnation, and may be relieved by needling points that clear the appropriate channels and restore free flow through the area concerned.

In Chinese terms headaches are more closely associated with the liver than any other organ. Stress and emotional upset impact strongly on the liver which, if it becomes too agitated, vents the excess energy upwards into the head. By inserting fine needles into the channels of qi energy an acupuncturist can stimulate the body's own healing response and help restore its natural equilibrium and alleviate the pain.



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The choice of points to treat depends on several factors including the exact location of the pain, the nature of the headache and the overall condition of the patient. Acupuncture will provide a personalised treatment designed for the individual.

Acupuncture can help by:

- reducing the frequency and intensity of headaches in many patients
- reducing the use of medication
- reducing the number of sick days taken
- showing a success rate of 50-80% comparable to the results of medication but without the side effects
- offering an effective preventative treatment for migraine

Research

Vickers et al (2004)

The results of a very large trial (400 patients) in the UK as published in the BMJ Pain, score: 34% improvement in the acupuncture group versus 16% for standard medical treatment (significant difference).

After receiving acupuncture patients had 22 fewer days of headache per year, made 25% fewer visits to the GP, and used 15% less medication.

<http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/content/news/news.asp?id=50>



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