

# THE VALUE OF ACUPUNCTURE FOR PAIN

by Shoshanna Katzman

Acupuncture is one of the oldest healing traditions in the world. In fact, archaeologists found bronze acupuncture needles, thus suggesting that acupuncture was practiced during the Bronze Age (2-3,000 BCE). Today, this ancient healing art is taking its legitimate place as a valuable therapeutic technique

in modern medicine. In the United States alone, over three million individuals receive acupuncture each year.

Such acceptance has come a long way since New York Times journalist James Reston reported receiving acupuncture as anesthesia for pain relief after an appendectomy during an inaugural China trip with

President Nixon in 1972. This was followed by the World Health Organization releasing a list of 43 diseases that might benefit from acupuncture as a result of a symposium they conducted on acupuncture in Beijing, China during June of 1979.

Another noteworthy seal of approval for acupuncture was in 1996, when the FDA classified acupuncture needles as medical devices. This was followed by the publication of a National Institute of Health (NIH) Consensus Statement in 1998, which reported on promising results gained from clinical trials concerning the efficacy of acupuncture as a form of adjunct therapy, especially for conditions associated with pain. More recent research conducted by the NIH has led to their statement that “acupuncture appears to be a reasonable option for people with chronic pain to consider.”

According to western medical research, it is believed that acupuncture works by stimulating the central nervous system. In fact, research using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the human brain has increased understanding about the central effect of acupuncture by showing specific and quantifiable effects on relevant brain structures. Acupuncture has also been said to activate the pituitary and hypothalamus glands, thereby altering secretion of neurotransmitters and neurohormones – thus reducing pain by directly influencing pain sensors and organ activity.

Furthermore, it is said that the body’s acupuncture points are conductors of electromagnetic signals, which trigger the flow of natural painkillers within the body known as endorphins. This premise was confirmed by an article published in Practical Pain Management as it found acupuncture works to relieve pain through the inactivation of its source by modulating endorphin levels. This article also reported that acupuncture is effective for relief of pain derived from temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJ).

Additional support for its alleviation of pain has been garnered from a 2012 study that found acupuncture to be better than no acupuncture or simulated acupuncture for treatment of chronic pain of the back, neck and shoulder as well as for headache and

osteoarthritis. Acupuncture is also known to alleviate many other forms of acute and chronic pain. These include conditions such as painful periods accompanied by menstrual cramps and symptoms associated with chemotherapy such as low energy, nausea, vomiting and pain.

According to ancient Chinese medicine principles, acupuncture is believed to work by accessing the body’s innate healing capability. It is said to restore flow of qi throughout the body and release blockages in order to re-establish balance, vitality and health. Such healing is accomplished

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through the insertion of hair-thin stainless steel needles into acupuncture points located along energy pathways known as meridians that conduct flow of qi (vital energy) throughout them

There are 365 main acupuncture points on the body that exist along 12 primary channels and 8 extraordinary meridians. In addition to numerous other points and pathways, acupuncture microsystems located on the ears and hands exist and are used as a form of distal treatment with great success, similar to application of acupressure to reflexology points on the feet. An acupuncture session involves placement of an average of 10 to 15 sterile, one-time use disposable needles. The standard duration of treatment is 20 minutes, as this is how long it takes for energy to move through the primary meridian system. For treatment of acute or chronic pain, an individual should experience positive results within eight treatments, with a typical series of treatment being 12-15 sessions.

Acupuncture is used regularly in China for anesthesia during major surgeries, and some hospitals in the United

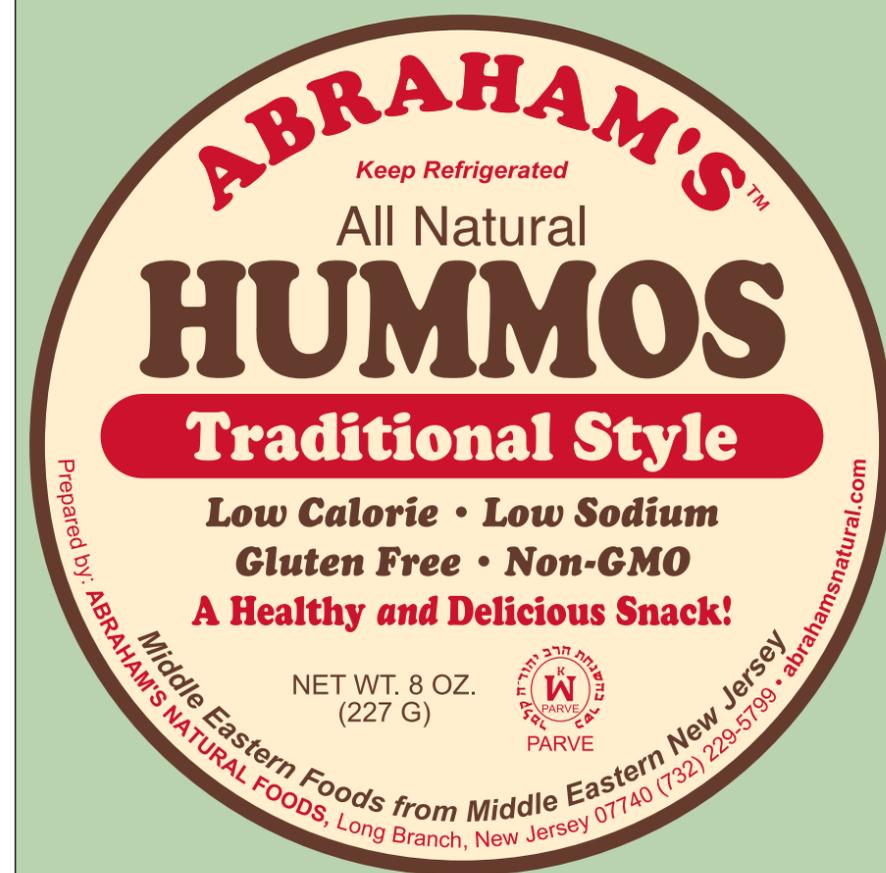
States are offering it during surgery for its calming effects and for reducing the amount of anesthetic drugs. Today, many health insurance companies in the United States reimburse for acupuncture, although to date it is not covered by Medicaid or Medicare. During the current era of opioid addiction, acupuncture provides great value as an alternative treatment to pain medication. Moreover, it provides a dual function as it is also an effective treatment for addiction related to substance abuse.

In summary, it can be clearly stated that the combination of the ancient

Chinese medical wisdom combined with modern scientific research provides great promise for the future of acupuncture. Through time, this will only continue to grow as it raises valuable awareness about acupuncture as a viable and safe treatment option for more and more people.

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