

## **Acupuncture**

### **What Is Acupuncture?**

Acupuncture is a technique in which practitioners stimulate specific points on the body—most often by inserting thin needles through the skin. It is one of the practices used in *traditional Chinese medicine*.

Results from a number of studies suggest that acupuncture may help ease types of pain that are often chronic such as low-back pain, neck pain, and osteoarthritis/knee pain. It also may help reduce the frequency of tension headaches and prevent migraine headaches. Therefore, acupuncture appears to be a reasonable option for people with chronic pain to consider. However, clinical practice guidelines are inconsistent in recommendations about acupuncture.

The effects of acupuncture on the brain and body and how best to measure them are only beginning to be understood. Current evidence suggests that many factors—like expectation and belief—that are unrelated to acupuncture needling may play important roles in the beneficial effects of acupuncture on pain.

### **What do we know about the effectiveness and safety of acupuncture?**

Research suggests that acupuncture can help manage certain pain conditions, but evidence about its value for other health issues is uncertain. Acupuncture is generally considered safe when performed by an experienced, well-trained practitioner using sterile needles. Improperly performed acupuncture can cause serious side effects.

*See the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) Web site for more information on traditional Chinese medicine.*

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Disclaimer: This information is not intended as a substitute for medical or chiropractic professional help or advice, but is to be used only as an aide in understanding spinal and nerve issues.

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