

# Acupuncture For Athletes

**With the commencement of the 2008 Summer Olympics, we wanted to dedicate this newsletter to athletes and discuss the many ways that Oriental medicine is used to prevent and assist with the healing of injuries as well as enhance athletic performance.**



All athletes and coaches are involved in a constant search for ways to improve performance and gain a competitive edge over their rivals. Many are finding that acupuncture can often provide that edge.

By following the principles of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), an acupuncture treatment can strengthen body function and restore internal harmony and balance. Professional sports teams and top athletes regularly have an acupuncturist on staff to treat injuries and to keep them performing at their peak.

Some of the best Olympic athletes are incorporating acupuncture into their wellness programs. China's most popular sportsman, the 7 foot 6 inch China basketball center, Yao Ming, used acupuncture and Oriental medicine to help him recover after undergoing surgery on his ankle this April.

Chinese swimmer, Wang Qun, was photographed last week doing some last minute training in Beijing with round marks on her back from an acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine treatment. The marks on the swimmers back were caused by *cupping*. Cupping is a technique in which a glass cup or bamboo jar is suctioned onto the body. It is used to relieve muscle pain, especially back pain from stiffness or injury; and to clear congestion in the chest, which can occur with common colds and influenza.

## **Studies on Acupuncture to Enhance Athletic Performance**

Studies have shown that acupuncture has measurable effects on the flow of blood to certain areas of the body, which could in turn boost athletic performance. One such study conducted at the *Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine* involved athletes running 5,000 meters, and afterwards sitting for acupuncture treatments before they had a chance to catch their breath. The heart rates of the athletes who received the treatments recovered more quickly than those in the control group.

Another study published in the *American Journal of Acupuncture* measured the effects of acupuncture on anaerobic threshold and work capacity during exercise in healthy young males. Researchers found that individuals in the acupuncture treatment group

had higher maximal exercise capacity and were able to perform higher workloads at the onset of blood lactate accumulation (OBLA) than individuals in the placebo group. The individuals that received acupuncture also had lower heart rates.

**Acupuncture is well known for its effectiveness in reducing most types of pain, including sports-related injuries.**

Acupuncture can be used to help decrease swelling, spasms and inflammation. Additionally, it can be used to control pain, increase range of motion and help promote healing. Because of its broad range of applications, acupuncture can be used during any of the phases of injury. The focus is not only to treat the injury but also to treat any underlying conditions that may predispose an individual to injuries. This is especially important when treating chronic or recurrent injuries that interfere with life activities or athletic performance.

Injuries occurring from sports are mostly due to trauma or overuse syndromes involving the musculoskeletal system and its soft tissues. Trauma to these soft tissues, including ligaments, tendons and muscles are generally the result from falls, blows, sprains/ strains, collisions, compressions crushing and disruptions of the healing processes due to inflammation.

**Some Commonly Treated Sports Injuries:**

- Muscle Pull
- Neck Pain
- Shoulder Impingement
- Tennis Elbow
- Lower Back Strain
- Groin Pull
- Hamstring Strain
- Runner's Knee
- Shin Splints
- Ankle Sprain
- Achilles Tendonitis
- Arch Pain



**Herbal Medicine for Athletes**

Herbal medicine is often an important aspect in the treatment of injury prevention and improved athletic performance.

**Siberian Ginseng** (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) has a wide range of health benefits attributed to its use including, helping the body find balance and adapt to stresses, increasing endurance, supporting the immune system, reducing inflammation, and promoting improved cognitive and physical performance. It is anti-inflammatory, immunogenic and chemoprotective in nature and is gentle enough to use on a regular basis.. It has been shown in studies to enhance athletic performance in all but the most elite athletes.



**Cordyceps** (*C. sinensis*) is also a very safe and gentle tonic. It is a very unusual herb, as it is a fungus that grows on caterpillars. In Traditional Chinese Medicine it is considered to be a lung tonic and has a long history of use in asthma treatment due to its effects of improving "the breath" and decreasing inflammation. Cordyceps has been shown to enhance the immune system, relax spasms of the heart, bronchi and intestines, improve sexual function, and invigorate energy levels while keeping one relaxed. Cordyceps is often for people with exercise-induced asthma and those with weakness of lung function.

**Ginseng** (*Panax Ginseng*) is a fundamental herb for improving energy levels in general and for sports performance in particular; it is one of the best known herbs in traditional Chinese medicine. It has been shown to shorten the latency period of and strengthen conditioned reflexes, speed transmission of nerve impulses, promote relaxation while restoring alertness, dilate coronary arteries and sustain proper cardiac rhythm, increase synthesis of proteins and nucleic acids, help maintain adequate blood sugar levels, and support adrenal, spleen, thyroid and thymus function. Panax Ginseng should only be taken for a limited amount of time to avoid overuse of this powerful and important herb.

*\* The improper use of herbal medicine can be dangerous. Please always consult with your practitioner before taking any herbal products.*

