

# Acupuncture and Autoimmune Disorders

## Treating Autoimmune Disease with Acupuncture



Over 50 million Americans suffer from autoimmune disease; an autoimmune disease occurs when the body's immune system attacks healthy tissue. Autoimmune disorders include Rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, thyroid disease, Addison's disease, pernicious anemia, celiac disease, multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis and Guillain–Barré syndrome. Due to the complexity of treating autoimmune disorders, integrative medicine solutions including acupuncture and Oriental medicine have received much attention as successful therapies in their treatment. Acupuncture is specifically noted for its use in pain relief, regulating the

immune system, managing symptoms and improving quality of life.

## What Causes Autoimmune Disease?

Under normal conditions, an immune response cannot be triggered against the cells of one's own body. In certain cases, however, immune cells make a mistake and attack the very cells that they are meant to protect. This can lead to a variety of autoimmune diseases. They encompass a broad category of over 100 diseases in which the person's immune system attacks his or her own tissue.

The exact mechanisms causing these changes are not completely understood, but bacteria, viruses, toxins, and some drugs may play a role in triggering an autoimmune process in someone who already has a genetic (inherited) predisposition to develop such a disorder. It is theorized that the inflammation initiated by these agents, toxic or infectious, somehow provokes in the body a "sensitization" (autoimmune reaction) in the involved tissues.

As the disease develops vague symptoms start to appear, such as joint and muscle pain, general muscle weakness, possible rashes or low-grade fever, trouble concentrating, or weight loss. The following symptoms may point toward something being wrong: numbness and tingling in hands and feet, dry eyes, hair loss, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, or repeated miscarriages can also be caused by an autoimmune response.

## How Acupuncture Treats Autoimmune Disorders

According to Oriental medicine, autoimmune disorders occur when there is imbalance within the body. Imbalance can come from an excess or deficiency of yin and yang that disrupts the flow of qi, or vital energy, through the body. Acupuncture is used to help the body restore balance, treating the root of the disorder, while specifically addressing the symptoms that are unique to each individual.

Clinical research has shown that acupuncture causes physical responses in nerve cells, the pituitary gland, and parts of the brain. These responses can cause the body to release proteins, hormones, and brain chemicals that control a number of body functions. It is proposed that, by these actions, acupuncture affects blood pressure, body temperature and the immune system.

In addition to acupuncture, your treatment program to manage your autoimmune disorder may involve a combination of therapies including stress reducing exercises, moderate physical activity, herbal medicine, nutritional support and bodywork.

### **Acupuncture Effective for Crohn's Disease**

In a study published in the journal, *Digestion*, acupuncture was found effective for treating Crohn's disease.

Crohn's disease is an autoimmune disease which involves chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. The main symptoms of Crohn's disease are abdominal pain, fever, fatigue and persistent, watery diarrhea. Symptoms range from mild to severe, and can come and go with periods of flare-ups.

In this German study, 51 patients with mild to moderately active Crohn's disease had a decrease in disease activity after receiving 10 sessions of acupuncture. Study members also showed an improvement in general well-being and reported an improvement in quality of life.

Source: Joos S, Brinkhaus B, Maluche C, Maupai N, Kohnen R, Kraehmer N, Hahn EG, Schuppan D. Acupuncture and moxibustion in the treatment of active Crohn's disease: a randomized controlled study. *Digestion*. 2004;69(3):131-9.

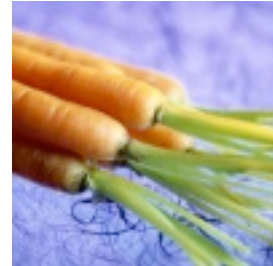
### **6 Food Tips for Autoimmune Disorders**

**A class of plant chemicals known as bioflavonoids has been found to dramatically reduce inflammation and improve symptoms associated with autoimmune disorders.**

**Tea:** Both green and black tea contain the flavonoids, catechins and theaflavins, which are beneficial in autoimmune disease.

**Apples:** Apples, contain the flavanoid, quercetin that can reduce allergic reactions and decrease inflammation. Quercetin occurs naturally in certain foods, such as apples (with the skin on), berries, red grapes, red onions, capers, and black tea.

**Carrots:** Carotenoids are a family of plant pigments that include beta-carotene. A lack of carotenoids in the diet is thought to promote inflammation. Good sources of carotenoids include apricots, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato, spinach, kale, butternut squash, and collard greens.



**Ginger:** Recent studies show that ginger reduces inflammation by inhibiting prostaglandin and suppresses the immune system's production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines, reducing disease severity in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

**Omega-3:** Omega-3 essential fatty acids can counter the formation of chemicals that cause inflammation. Good natural sources include flaxseed oil and salmon.

**Fiber:** A healthy and active colon can decrease food sensitivity, which, in turn, can lighten the burden on your immune system. For maximum autoimmune health, increase the fiber in your diet.