

## May Newsletter - Acupuncture for Arthritis

**May is National Arthritis Month and there's no better time to take action. If you suffer with arthritis, acupuncture can help.**

Arthritis is one of the most pervasive diseases in the United States and is the leading cause of disability. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every three Americans (an estimated seventy million people) is affected.



For most people, arthritis pain and inflammation cannot be avoided as the body ages. In fact, most people over the age of fifty show some signs of arthritis as joints degenerate over time. Fortunately, arthritis can often be managed with acupuncture.

### **What is Arthritis?**

Arthritis is not just one disease; it is a complex disorder that comprises more than one hundred distinct symptoms and can affect people at any stage of life. Two of the most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. While these two forms of arthritis have very different causes, risk factors and effects on the body, they share a common symptom—persistent joint pain.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis in the United States. OA begins with the breakdown of joint cartilage, resulting in pain and stiffness. Commonly affected joints include the fingers, knees, hips, and spine. Other joints affected less frequently include the wrists, elbows, shoulders, and ankles. When OA is found in a less frequently affected joint, there is usually a history of injury or unusual stress to that joint. Repetitive injury and physical trauma may contribute to the development of OA. If you have a strenuous job that requires repetitive bending, kneeling, or squatting, for example, you may be at high risk for OA of the knee.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, systemic inflammatory disorder that may affect many tissues and organs, but principally attacks synovial joints. Inflammation of the joint lining, called the synovium, causes pain, stiffness, swelling, warmth, and redness. The affected joint may also lose its shape, resulting in loss of normal movement.

### **Eastern View of Arthritis**

In Oriental medicine, arthritis is called "Bi Syndrome." Bi Syndrome manifests as pain, soreness, or numbness of muscles, tendons and joints. Arthritis is treated according to which type of Bi Syndrome it falls into:

1. Moving (Wind) Bi Syndrome: Pain in the joints is widespread and moves from one area of the body to another. This is often accompanied by fever and chills.
2. Stationary (Damp) Bi Syndrome: The pain is localized and does not move. The body and limbs feel heavy and there is numbness and swelling.
3. Painful (Cold) Bi Syndrome: Severe pain in one part, or over one half of the body which becomes worse with cold and diminishes with warmth.
4. Heat Bi Syndrome: The flesh is hot, the area of pain is red and swollen, and the pain increases upon contact.

The type of Bi Syndrome the arthritis falls into will determine which acupuncture points and other treatment options will be utilized. The purpose of acupuncture is to trigger your body's innate ability to self heal. Treatments take all of your symptoms into account and are aimed at balancing the energy within the body, increasing the flow of qi and blood to the affected area, bringing down swelling and inflammation, relieving pain, and helping to prevent re-occurrence of the arthritis.

**Studies show that acupuncture can stimulate the production of hormones that reduce pain and inflammation.**

In a German study, 3,500 people with osteoarthritis of the hip and/or knee received 15 sessions of acupuncture combined with their usual medical care. The results showed that the patients that had acupuncture had less pain and stiffness, improved function and better quality of life than their counterparts who had routine care alone. The improvements occurred immediately after completing a three-month course of acupuncture and lasted for at least another three months, indicating osteoarthritis is among conditions treated with acupuncture.

Another study, published in the journal *Pain*, looked at the effects of acupuncture among 40 adults with osteoarthritis of the knee. Among the patients in the study, those who had a daily acupuncture session for 10 consecutive days reported greater improvement in their pain compared with patients who received a "sham" version of the therapy.



**Resources:**

*Pain Online*, December 15, 2009.

*Arthritis & Rheumatism*, November 2006; vol 54: pp 3485-349

**Anti-inflammatory Diet**

**Your diet plays a crucial role in helping you avoid or control arthritis.**

The first objective of a healthy diet is to help you lose weight if you are overweight. Being overweight can cause additional stress to your joints.

Another way a balanced, varied diet can help ease the pain of arthritis is by providing vitamins and minerals that keep your joints healthy and avoiding “damp” foods such as dairy products and greasy or spicy foods.

**Here are some other healthy and delicious choices to include in your diet.**

- **Ginger** - Ginger has been found to be a natural anti-inflammatory. make tea by combining one-half teaspoon of grated ginger root with eight ounces of boiling water. Cover and steep for 10 to 15 minutes, then strain and add honey to taste.
- **Fresh pineapple** - Bromelain, an enzyme in pineapple, reduces inflammation. Be sure the pineapple is fresh, not canned or frozen.
- **Cherries** - Recent research has shown that tart cherries are an excellent source of nutrients that may help to reduce joint pain and inflammation related to arthritis.
- **Fish** - Cold-water fish such as salmon and mackerel contain omega-3 fatty acids, which help keep joints healthy as well as reduce pain and swelling. If you don't care for fish, consider supplementing your diet with fish oil capsules.
- **Turmeric** - Another natural anti-inflammatory. You can sprinkle turmeric on scrambled eggs, add it to soups, or mix it into sauces or salad dressings.

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