

Treating Pain With Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the treatment of conditions by stimulating specific points of the body (acupoints). Acupuncture is most frequently used to treat pain.

Types of Acupuncture

There are 3 main types of acupuncture. **Conventional acupuncture** involves stimulating acupoints using very thin stainless steel needles. **Electrical acupuncture** is similar to the conventional type but uses electrical impulses given through the needles. **Transcutaneous electrical acupoint stimulation** involves electrical stimulation of acupoints without using needles. This week's *JAMA* includes an article on the use of acupuncture to treat knee pain.

Principles of Acupuncture

In traditional Chinese medicine, certain body systems, called **meridians**, are thought to regulate body function through the normal flow of energy (*qi*) from one part to another. Disturbances in this flow are thought to cause disease. Acupressure and acupuncture techniques are believed by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine to cure disease by restoring this flow.

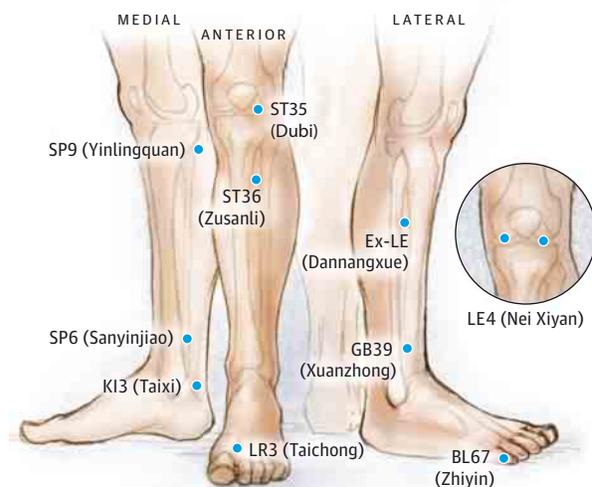
Successful acupuncture involves stimulation of the correct skin region associated with an organ or disease process. Because the various meridians are thought to be connected, practitioners sometimes apply acupuncture along the pathway from one region to another. Practitioners also sometimes apply acupuncture directly to a painful point. This may help reduce pain at that point.

You should tell your doctor that you are receiving acupuncture. Acupuncture may interact with other treatments you are receiving.

Training and Licensing

Many US insurance plans cover acupuncture treatments. But your acupuncturist should be properly trained and licensed. In the United States, acupuncturists must complete a 3- to 4-year educational program. These programs must be accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. To obtain a license, acupuncturists in most states must pass a course administered by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. They also must pass a certification examination. More information about qualifications can be found at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/decisions/credentialing.htm>.

Selected acupuncture points for treatment of pain



FOR MORE INFORMATION

- National Institutes for Health: National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine
<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/whatiscom/chinesemed.htm>
- National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
www.nccaom.org/regulatory-affairs/state-licensure-map

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