

## Some of the following are common conditions which are regularly treated through acupuncture:

### Lower Back Pain

Lower back pain, affects eight out of 10 people at some point in their lives and is referred to as lumbago. The orthodox treatment for back pain is generally some form of physiotherapy or pain medication.

Physiotherapy is the treatment and prevention of injury and disease by natural means. The aim of physiotherapy is to help alleviate pain, restore normal movement and function and assist in returning the body to its natural balanced state without using chemicals. Physiotherapists employ a wide range of therapies to achieve this.

Non-steroidal anti inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) have several well-known potential side-effects, such as gastric irritation and liver damage, while acupuncture has virtually none.

Most pain-relief and anti-inflammatory medications provide excellent short-term pain-relief by blocking the production of pain-causing prostaglandins. However, prostaglandins also help enhance circulation and by inhibiting their production, there will be decreased sensitivity to pain, but the blood supply to the muscles and joints will also decrease, creating problems and prolonging recovery.

Acupuncture produces a different effect; it stimulates neurological processes which trigger the release of chemicals from the brain and spinal cord, which help in the reduction of pain. Practitioners also attempt to enhance blood circulation, especially in the area concerned, using specific acupuncture techniques. When circulation in the tissue improves, muscle relaxation occurs and immediate pain reduction often follows. The use of acupuncture to treat this condition has increased dramatically in the past few decades, based to a large extent on placebo-controlled studies that have validated it as a reliable method of pain relief and also due to its use by Physiotherapists.

### Neck and shoulder

Acupuncture is thought to be an effective solution when treating most neck and shoulder problems, which are very common concerns, especially of people who work in an office. Sitting in front of a computer and typing for extensive periods of time causes a lack of circulation in the tissue and fatigue of the muscles involved. Most neck and shoulder stiffness results from two factors: continuous mechanical strain and emotional stress. The treatment approach must consider both aspects. Needling stimulation is applied to the neck and shoulder muscles to further release muscle tightness.

### Tennis Elbow

Tennis elbow is really an inflammation of the outside of the elbow. The outer part of the elbow becomes painful and tender as a result of damage or tearing of the tendons and muscles of this area.

Acupuncture is used often along with moxibution in order to decrease the hypertonicity of common extensor muscles.

The conventional approach often involves physiotherapy treatments, use of anti-inflammatory drugs, and may include an injection of a small dose of steroid to the affected area.

### Fertility

Treatment of infertility will depend on the cause. Medical treatment for female infertility include among them surgery to treat certain problems (e.g., endometriosis); medications to facilitate ovulation, artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization.

Depending on the cause of infertility, a natural approach is found to be very valuable. Functional related infertility is often related to stress. Acupuncture is useful for decreasing excess tension in the body by balancing the autonomic nervous system. Possible hormonal imbalances and circulatory problems may also be addressed by acupuncture.

### Safety

Acupuncture is not inherently dangerous but being an invasive technique, it is not risk free. In the age of HIV and hepatitis it's essential to check the credentials of the practitioner and their health and safety practices by ensuring only new sterile disposable needles are used. It is useful to note that acupuncturists are not always doctors and will often not have the capability of diagnosing a serious illness. The British Acupuncture Council, is the UK's largest professional body for the practice of acupuncture and more information can be sought by visiting [www.acupuncture.org.uk](http://www.acupuncture.org.uk). ●

## Case Study

Monika Begum, 36

My doctor diagnosed me with plantar fasciitis or heel spur, which gave me a severe pain in my right heel and I was unable to walk. Standard treatment included cortisone injections into the heel, specially built insoles into the shoes or cutting the nerve between the toe and the heel. None of these seemed appealing. My mother had had the same condition and had gone through all standard medical treatments bar the final nerve cut but to no avail. An enlightened GP suggested acupuncture to her and it worked. I decided to bypass all conventional treatments and went directly to a podiatrist who specialised in acupuncture. Two sessions of acupuncture on my right foot quickly ended nine months of escalating pain. When my left foot developed the condition, I quickly went to the same acupuncturist and was cured. Two years later and the condition has still not returned. I am now using acupuncture to treat my migraines.

