

# The Benefits of Acupuncture

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Acupuncture offers something for everyone. For fitness junkies, acupuncture can ease muscle tightness and pain, speeding up exercise recovery and enhancing performance.

## What Is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture, a mainstay within traditional Chinese medicine, is stimulating specific points on the body (also known as acupoints) to promote health and healing.

There are several different styles of acupuncture. Some even feature their unique acupoints. While many acupuncture practitioners stick to the standard method of inserting thin, sterile needles into the skin, others practice styles that combine needles with a mild electric current (known as electroacupuncture), magnets, heat lamps, or warming herbs (known as moxibustion). Some forms of acupuncture-like trigger point acupuncture and dry needling focus more on releasing soft tissue constriction and muscle tightness, regardless of where that tightness is with a traditional acupoint.

## What Are the Benefits of Acupuncture?

By stimulating specific points on the body, acupuncture can help regulate the nervous system, regulating several physiological processes inside your body. When your nervous system functions well, your body also works well, creating a cascade of benefits. We'll review some of these benefits below.

## Acupuncture Reduces Pain and Inflammation

[The American Pain Society](#) lists acupuncture as an effective treatment option for people dealing with chronic pain, including low-back and neck pain, migraines, and pain associated with the "wear-and-tear" joint condition osteoarthritis.

We still don't completely understand how acupuncture works to reduce pain. Still, one theory is that acupuncture triggers your nervous system to release natural pain-relieving chemicals, much like opioid pain relievers (ex. morphine). That said, be sure to consult with your doctor if you experience chronic pain. This way, he or she can rule out any severe conditions that may need immediate treatment.

Acupuncture also lowers inflammation and may be used to treat inflammatory conditions, such as hay fever. [A review published in 2013](#) reveals that acupuncture may act as an antihistamine and even keep proinflammatory substances from forming in the first place.

## Acupuncture Releases Tight Muscles and Prevent Sports Injuries

Acupuncture is also a helpful tool for recreational and professional athletes who struggle with muscle tightness and pain during or after exercise.

Muscles often get tight from overuse, poor posture, or structural issues. Tight muscles pull on their attachments (i.e., tendons and joints), which not only causes pain, it also limits how much work those muscles can do. As a result, other muscles and joints kick in to compensate. This increases the likelihood that those helper muscles and joints will get overworked, leading to more pain or even injury. For example, tightness in the shoulder can cause your elbow joints to take on more work when you perform push-ups, which can eventually lead to elbow pain or injury.

Acupuncture can help relieve muscle tightness and prevent injury by releasing areas where the muscle is constricted. These areas are often referred to as "knots." However, when a band of muscle tissue, or knot, becomes hyperirritable and tight, it can cause referred pain to other areas of the body. When this happens, knots become what is known as "trigger points." Referred pain from trigger points can recreate the symptoms of chronic pain disorders, including tension headaches, shoulder pain, low-back pain and migraines, according to a [2019 review](#).

By releasing trigger points, acupuncture restores muscle and returns it closer to a healthy length. This action increases the muscle's range of motion and improves local blood circulation to the muscle tissue, which can ease the workload on surrounding muscles and joints. Over time, this helps decrease pain and prevent future injury.

Acupuncture can help treat several exercise-related injuries, including muscle strains, IT band syndrome, plantar fasciitis, tennis and golfer's elbow, and bursitis. It can also be used as an adjunct treatment to reduce inflammation, promote circulation, and relieve muscle tightness post-surgery.

## Acupuncture Can Relieves Menstrual Cramps

Suppose you're one of many active women who deal with severe cramps during your period (the medical term is "dysmenorrhea"). In that case, acupuncture may offer some relief, helping you continue your workouts uninterrupted by pain. A [2018 analysis of studies](#) found that acupuncture may be more effective at easing menstrual pain and associated symptoms than nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

Essentially, acupuncture helps reduce period pain by activating nerves that [regulate blood flow to the uterus and ovaries](#) and [stimulating the release of natural pain-relieving chemicals](#) in your body.

Acupuncture can be an excellent tool for keeping menstrual cramps under control, but be sure to keep your physician or OB/GYN in the loop about any menstrual issues you're experiencing.

## Acupuncture Lowers Stress and Anxiety

If you suffer from stress and anxiety, acupuncture could be a helpful addition to your routine. After all, people have turned to acupuncture to relieve stress and anxiety for decades. Now, research offers a clue as to how: A [2013 study](#) in rats found that acupuncture slows the production of stress hormones in the body. Similarly, a more [recent study](#) (also in rats) suggests that acupuncture lowers anxiety by affecting how it triggers the "fight-or-flight" stress response.

## Acupuncture Is Relatively Safe

The [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#) notes that acupuncture is generally safe when performed by a qualified practitioner using sterile needles. Relatively few complications from acupuncture have been reported. The most common side effects of acupuncture include bruising, soreness, and bleeding at the needling site.

## Additional Benefits of Acupuncture

- Acupuncture releases tight muscles.
- Acupuncture reduces pain and inflammation.
- Acupuncture improves blood circulation to muscle tissues.
- Acupuncture reduces stress and anxiety.
- Acupuncture eases menstrual cramps.
- Acupuncture is relatively safe and complication-free

## How to Find An Acupuncturist

For your safety, it's essential that you only receive acupuncture treatments from a qualified practitioner. Find practitioners through the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture

and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) practitioner directory: <https://www.nccaom.org/find-a-practitioner-directory/>