

# Acupuncture Treats Headaches and Migraines

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## Migraine and Headache Sufferers Acupuncture Can Help

The pain that headache and migraine sufferers endure can impact every aspect of their lives. Acupuncture can offer powerful relief without the side effects that prescription and over-the-counter drugs can cause. Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine have been used to relieve Headaches and Migraines, as well as their underlying causes, for thousands of years and is a widely accepted form of treatment for headaches in our society. There are acupuncturists that specialize in the treatment of headaches and migraines and can help you manage your pain with acupuncture and Chinese herbs alone, or as part of a comprehensive treatment program.

### Diagnosis with Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese Medicine does not recognize migraines and recurring headaches as one particular syndrome. Instead, it aims to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual using a variety of **techniques** such as acupuncture, Chinese herbs, tui-na massage, and energetic exercises to restore imbalances found in the body. Therefore, your diagnosis and treatment will depend on a number of variables: Is the headache behind your eyes and temples, or is it located more on the top of your head? When do your headaches occur (i.e. night, morning, after eating)? Do you find that a cold compress or a dark room can alleviate some of the pain? Do you describe the pain as dull and throbbing, or sharp and piercing?

### How Acupuncture Works

These questions will help create a clear picture on which your practitioners can create a treatment plan specifically for you. The basic foundation for Oriental medicine is that there is a life energy flowing through the body which is termed Qi (pronounced chee). This energy flows through the body on channels known as meridians that connect all of our major organs. According to Chinese medical theory, illness arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes unbalanced. Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points located near or on the surface of the skin which have the ability to alter various biochemical and physiological conditions in order to achieve the desired effect.

### The Acupuncture Treatment

Acupuncture points to treat headaches are located all over the body. During the acupuncture treatment, tiny needles will be placed along your legs, arms, shoulders, and perhaps even your big toe!

There seems to be little sensitivity to the insertion of acupuncture needles. They are so thin that several acupuncture needles can go into the middle of a hypodermic needle. Occasionally, there is a brief moment of discomfort as the needle penetrates the skin, but

once the needles are in place, most people relax and even fall asleep for the duration of the treatment.

The length, number and frequency of treatments will vary. Typical treatments last from five to 30 minutes, with the patient being treated one or two times a week. Some symptoms are relieved after the first treatment, while more severe or chronic ailments often require multiple treatments. The **style of acupuncture** that your acupuncturist has been trained in will play a roll in length of treatment, number of points used and frequency of visits.

### **Studies on Acupuncture and Headaches**

Since the early seventies, studies around the globe have suggested that acupuncture is an effective treatment for migraines and headaches. Recent studies show extremely positive results:

In a case study, published in the June 2003 Issue of *Medical Acupuncture*, doctors found that acupuncture resulted in the resolution or reduction in the frequency and severity of cluster headaches, and a decrease or discontinuation of medications. It was concluded that Acupuncture can be used to provide sustained relief from cluster headaches and to stimulate adrenal cortisol to aid in discontinuing corticosteroids.

A clinical observation, published in a 2002 edition of the *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, of 50 patient presenting with various types of headaches were treated with scalp acupuncture. The results of this study showed that 98% of patients treated with scalp acupuncture experienced no headaches or only occasional, mild headaches in the six months following care.

In a study published in the November 1999 issue of *Cephalalgia*, scientists evaluated the effectiveness of acupuncture in the treatment of migraines and recurrent headaches by systematically reviewing 22 randomized controlled trials. A total of 1,042 patients were examined. It was found that headache and migraine sufferers experienced significantly more relief from acupuncture than patients who were administered “sham” acupuncture.