

ARTHRITIS AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE
PART ONE: AN OVERVIEW

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According to TCM, there are many potential causes of arthritis. These include weakness of the internal organs, defective genetics, weak joints, injury, aging, tension or stress and qi deficiency. Acupuncture (one component of TCM), can help alleviate pain, which is the primary complaint amongst arthritis sufferers. TCM treatment options are based on a diagnosis that is specific to each individual and can involve acupuncture, prescription of individualized Chinese herbal formulas, electro acupuncture, magnetic therapy, moxabustion and Tui-Na. Acupuncture treatment can relieve pain in several ways:

- Acupuncture causes the body to produce endorphins that inhibit the perception of pain.
- It stimulates the adrenal glands to produce natural steroids, which have an anti-inflammatory effect.
- Acupuncture deactivates trigger points (these are extremely reactive and tender areas that can occur in the muscles and fascial sheaths of the body).
- It affects the nervous system by blocking the transmission of pain signals to the brain.
- Acupuncture stimulates the parathyroid glands to produce the hormone that draws Calcium out of bones, decreasing arthritic calcifications.

There is currently a lot of research being done to study the efficacy of acupuncture treatment for arthritis. According to a recent study funded by the National Institutes of Health, acupuncture has been shown to help alleviate the pain of arthritis in the knees, hips and shoulders. The study, which was completed by researchers from the University of Maryland's School of Medicine, provides scientific proof that acupuncture may reduce the pain of arthritis when used in conjunction with conventional Western medicine. Physicians in the Western hemisphere have traditionally disregarded the use of acupuncture, claiming that no studies have shown it to be effective. This NIH study indicates that integrative medicine (using both Western and TCM concepts together) can be effective and should be promoted in the treatment of arthritis.

Another recent study found that electro acupuncture is significantly more effective in the symptomatic treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee than a commonly prescribed pain medication, Diclofenac. Interestingly, the combination of acupuncture and Diclofenac treatment was no more effective than acupuncture treatment alone.

Research in China has shown that cervical bony spurs have disappeared after several courses of acupuncture treatment. However, it is important to note that when a joint reaches a certain level of deterioration, acupuncture cannot and will not restore it to a normal state.

This has been a basic overview of the treatment of arthritis from a TCM perspective. Please refer to part two of this article, *Arthritis and Traditional Chinese Medicine: Clinical Considerations*, for more information about how acupuncture can be used to treat arthritis.

Sources:

**Causes of Arthritis from Chinese Medical Perspective by Yang, Jwing-Ming*