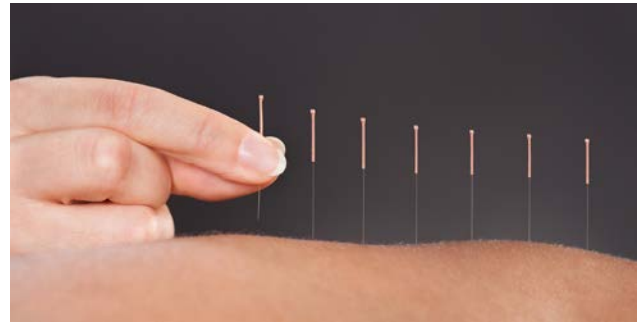


Acupuncture Likely to Ease Neck Pain

Two alternative therapies get a boost of scientific legitimacy in a new study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Acupuncture, the ancient practice of needle insertion, and the Alexander Technique, a program that teaches people how to avoid unnecessary muscle tension throughout the day and improve posture, coordination, balance, and stress, are two complementary therapies often used to help treat neck pain.

The researchers wanted to see how well two of these worked. They assigned 517 people, all of whom had neck pain for at least three months (and sometimes many years), to the standard care for neck pain, which involves prescription medications and physical therapy. Some of the patients were assigned to also receive one of two extra treatments: a dozen 50-minute acupuncture sessions or 20 private Alexander Technique lessons which focus on teaching people how to move their body to avoid or correct muscular pain.

A year after the start of the study, people in the groups doing acupuncture and the Alexander Technique had significant reductions in neck pain—assessed by questionnaire—compared to those



who just got usual care. Both groups reported about 32% less pain than they had at the start of the study, which is far greater than the 9% typically associated with physical therapy and exercise. The interventions also gave people in the groups more self-efficacy, which were linked to better pain outcomes.

The study adds to growing evidence suggesting that acupuncture is effective against pain. Acupuncture manipulates the nervous system, activating the release of pain-relieving endorphins. The influx of new research has helped legitimize alternative therapies like acupuncture.

Yoga Works for Back Pain

A study is touting the benefits of yoga for people with back problems. The new research put yoga head-to-head against physical therapy and found the two were equally good at restoring function and reducing the need for pain medication over time. In the new study, published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, a group of 320 people did 12 weeks of yoga or physical therapy, or they simply received a book and newsletters about coping with back pain. People in the active treatment groups reported that their pain was less intense than it was



at the start of the study and that they were able to physically move more. Some were also able to reduce, or even stop, their pain medications.

This research is unique because the people in the study were racially diverse, and most were from low-income families. Many had pre-existing medical conditions. That's important, say the researchers, because chronic back pain has a greater impact on minorities and people of lower socioeconomic status.

Most studies on yoga for back pain have included mostly white and middle-class people, said lead author Dr. Robert Saper, director of integrative medicine and a family physician at Boston Medical Center, in a video interview produced by the American College of Physicians.

The once-a-week yoga classes in the study were designed specifically for back-pain patients, the authors note, so the results may not apply to all types of yoga or all kinds of classes. Participants in both

the yoga and physical therapy groups attended an average of seven sessions over 12 weeks, and a few people in each group reported mild joint and back pain as a result of their treatment.

Based on their findings, the authors conclude that yoga may be a reasonable alternative to physi-

cal therapy, depending on availability, cost, and patient preference. "Our study shows that when yoga is made available and affordable to a diverse population, people of both sexes, people who are disabled, different races and economic backgrounds are receptive to yoga and, more importantly, can benefit from it," said Saper.

Hypnosis and the Conscious Awareness of Intentions

Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and hypnotic suggestion are all names for a type of therapy that involves putting people into a trance-like state. Achieving this state is intended to promote focus in an individual. In this focused state, a person can be more receptive to suggestions. Researchers have stud-



ied whether hypnosis can treat a variety of medical conditions, from irritable bowel syndrome to anxiety and depression. The goal for hypnotherapy is to help a patient learn to better control their state of awareness. In the case of depression, hypnotherapy sessions is focused on helping a person achieve a state of relaxation. In this relaxed state, they can discuss their feelings and emotions without raising stress and anxiety levels.

Hypnotherapy offers the potential to help treat your medical conditions without the need for invasive therapies or additional medications. Therapists

consider hypnotherapy a safe treatment option, with minimal side effects. Hypnotherapy is also known as a complementary therapy. A person can use hypnotherapy in addition to other treatments for depression to enhance an overall sense of well-being, lift mood, and boost feelings of hopefulness. Hypnotherapists use it to treat several conditions, including anxiety, chronic pain, concentration problems, irritable bowel syndrome, smoking control, and teeth grinding.

Hypnotherapy is also used to treat negative behaviours that could be worsening a person's depression.

Hypnotherapy appears to work best when used with other forms of treatment, says Steve G. Kopp, a licensed mental health counsellor and marriage and family therapist.

All about Naturopathic Medicine

Naturopathic medicine is a system that uses natural remedies to help the body heal itself. It embraces many therapies, including herbs, massage, acupuncture, exercise, and nutritional counselling. The goal of naturopathic medicine is to treat the whole person that means mind, body, and spirit. It also aims to heal the root causes of an illness and not just stop the symptoms.

Naturopathic medicine is used for most health issues like allergies, headaches, fertility issues, digestive problems, obesity, hormonal imbalances, chronic pain and chronic fatigue syndrome

A few naturopathic treatments have known side



effects and risks:

- Supplements (vitamin and herbal): Some of these may interfere with prescription medications. In large doses, certain vitamins may raise the risk of cancer.
- Spinal adjustments: As a part of naturopathic manipulative treatment, the doctor may apply pressure to the spine. This can damage arteries, nerves, bones, and spinal discs. In rare cases, it may lead to a stroke.
- Detox diets: These treatments are meant to get rid of body toxins. They involve cutting out certain foods or fasting. This can be dangerous for people with some chronic conditions, like diabetes.

It's a good option for people who might not find relief for their chronic illness through traditional medicine.

Benefits of Fire Cupping

Fire cupping, also known as cupping therapy, is a treatment technique that places glass, bamboo, or plastic jars on the skin to enhance circulation, relieve pain, and extract toxins from the body. Fire cupping is an alternative, non-invasive treatment technique that uses special cups placed on the skin to encourage blood flow to damaged areas. This unique therapy is often recommended to patients who suffer from muscular pain, joint pain, and skin problems.



During treatment, a physical therapist puts a flammable substance inside of a glass or silicone cup before lighting it on fire. The physical therapist allows the fire to go out before placing it on the skin. The cup is left on the skin for up to three minutes, creating a suction that causes the skin to rise and redden within the cup. This process causes blood vessels to expand, encouraging blood flow and increased circulation to the damaged areas. While fire cupping may be recommended to patients with specific musculoskeletal conditions, it is ideal for any patient who wishes to heal soft tissue injuries and reduce overall pain and inflammation.

There haven't been many scientific studies pub-

lished on fire cupping, but the ones that have been published demonstrate the health benefits this therapy can offer. However, a study published in the *Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine* found that fire cupping was beneficial in the treatment of acne, herpes zoster, and chronic pain. Another study published in *PLoS One* discovered fire cupping was a safe and effective treatment modality for several diseases and conditions, including acne, facial paralysis, and cervical spondylosis.

Although fire cupping is deemed a safe procedure, side effects can still arise. Patients may experience mild discomfort, bruising, burns, and in rare instances, mild infections during and after certain forms of cupping therapy.