

## Acupuncture for Headaches and Migraine

Headaches and migraines are two of the conditions that patients most commonly present with in general practice. Treating it costs the NHS millions of pounds each year. 60% of sufferers have to take time off work because of their symptoms.

### Acupuncture and pain

Acupuncture has a reliable reputation for treating many different painful conditions. Many patients have benefited from treatment and there is increasing research evidence to support their experiences. The combination of patients' experience and clinical evidence also supports the use of acupuncture for treating persistent headaches and migraines (see 'NICE recommends acupuncture').

### Holistic medicine

Acupuncture is part of traditional Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine looks at your illness 'holistically', that is, in the context of your life. How you live your life, the food you eat, the work you do, the stress you are under, all these are considered to be as important as your symptoms and what is going on in your body to cause these symptoms. These things affect your body in subtle yet powerful ways, upsetting the normal flow of 'energy' and causing discomfort. For instance, research has shown that the precipitating factor in the onset of the majority of migraines is tiredness, lack of food or both.

By identifying what elements are influencing your energetic flow, I can set about remedying the anomalies, partly with treatment, but also with guidance and advice.

### Cumulative effect

Acupuncture doesn't just treat the symptoms of migraine. It is not like taking a painkiller such as Paracetamol, where the effect is only short-lived, and the medication has no long-term effect on the incidence of migraine. If acupuncture is applied properly, its effect is cumulative, each treatment producing more of an effect. The headaches reduce in intensity and frequency over time, usually a period of weeks or months. As your symptoms improve, the frequency of acupuncture treatment can slowly reduce. Eventually, if the symptoms disappear completely, then treatment can be discontinued. Some patients need maintenance treatment, possibly once per month or less.

### Tackling the underlying problem

Acupuncture can have this effect because the treatment is designed to tackle the underlying 'energetic' disturbances that cause the migraine, as well as the local symptoms. Typically, needles are inserted in the scalp, the neck, the hands and the feet. In addition, as has been mentioned already, it is important to identify any predisposing factors, such as diet or stress. As the symptoms improve, you can begin to take control and manage these predisposing factors so that they have less effect.

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If you have not already done so, you may be asked to consult your GP before commencing treatment.