

## Acupuncture in chronic pain management – a summary of evidence

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### Acupuncture is effective for chronic pain

In 2009, the National Health Service of the United Kingdom wrote in their low back pain clinical management guideline that for early management of persistent non-specific low back pain, “an exercise programme, a course of manual therapy, or a course of acupuncture” should be recommended at the early stage.[1] In addition, trials on neck pain, headache, and osteoarthritis in the knee have all shown that acupuncture not only reduces pain but also improves patients’ physical function in the long term. Below is a summary of recent large trials of acupuncture for chronic pain.

### Acupuncture is effective for acute pain

The 2010 edition (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) of “Acute Pain Management: Scientific Evidence” by the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists and Faculty of Pain Medicine states that there is level one evidence (the highest level) that acupuncture is effective in reducing post-operative pain and opioid-related adverse effects.[2]

**Table A Summary of Recent Acupuncture Studies on Chronic Pain**

| <i>Conditions</i>  | <i>Acupuncture</i>    | <i>Usual care</i>  | <i>Waiting-list</i> | <i>Long term effect</i> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Neck pain (Neck pain and disability)[3]                                  | Reduced by 28%        | Reduced by 5.8%    |                     | 6 months                |
| Osteoarthritis in the knee (WOMAC index)[4]                              | Improved by 47%       |                    | Improved by 6%      | 12 months               |
| Osteoarthritis in the knee ( 36% WOMAC index reduction) [5]              | Success rate 53%      | Success rate 29%   |                     | 6 months                |
| Chronic low back pain (Back pain intensity)[6]                           | Reduced by 37%        | Reduced by 9.8%    |                     | 6 months                |
| Chronic low back pain (Roland-Morris Disability Questionnaire score) [7] | Reduced by 4.4 points | Reduced 2.1 points |                     | 12 months               |
| Chronic daily headache (Headache score)[8]                               | Reduced by 22%        | Reduced by 16%     |                     | 12 months               |
| Tension-type headache (Headache days per 4 weeks)[9]                     | Reduced by 7.2 days   |                    | Reduced by 1.5 days | 6 months                |
| Migraine (Headache days per 4 weeks)[10]                                 | Reduced by 2.2 days   |                    | Reduced by 0.8 days | 6 months                |

## References

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