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Acupuncture for Athletes

With the commencement of the 2012 Summer Olympics, we wanted to dedicate this newsletter to athletes and discuss the many ways that Oriental medicine is used to help prevent and heal injuries and enhance athletic performance.

All athletes and coaches are involved in an ongoing search for ways to improve performance and gain a competitive edge over their rivals. Many are finding that acupuncture can often provide that edge.

By following the principles of traditional Oriental medicine, an acupuncture treatment can strengthen body function and restore internal harmony and balance. Professional sports teams and top athletes often have an acupuncturist on staff to treat injuries and keep them performing at their peak.

Some of the best Olympic athletes incorporate acupuncture into their wellness programs. China's most popular sportsman, the 7 foot 6 inch basketball center, Yao Ming, used acupuncture and Oriental medicine to help him recover after undergoing surgery on his ankle.

Chinese swimmer, Wang Qun, was photographed doing some last minute training in Beijing with round marks on her back from a traditional Oriental medicine treatment. The marks on the swimmer's back were caused by *cupping*. Cupping is a technique in which a glass cup or bamboo jar is suctioned onto the body. It is used to relieve muscle pain, especially back pain from stiffness or injury; and to clear congestion in the chest, which can occur with common colds and influenza.

Studies on Acupuncture to Enhance Athletic Performance

Studies have shown that acupuncture has measurable effects on the flow of blood to certain areas of the body, which could in turn boost athletic performance. One such study conducted at the *Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine* involved athletes running 5,000 meters, and afterwards sitting for acupuncture treatments before they had a chance to catch their breath. The heart rates of the athletes who received the treatments recovered more quickly than those in the control group.

Another study published in the *American Journal of Acupuncture* measured the effects of acupuncture on anaerobic threshold and work capacity during exercise in healthy young males. Researchers found that individuals in the acupuncture treatment group had higher maximal exercise capacity and were able to perform higher workloads at the onset of blood lactate accumulation (OBLA) than individuals in the placebo group. The individuals that received acupuncture also had lower heart rates.



In This Issue

- Acupuncture for Athletes
- Acupuncture for Injury Rehabilitation
- Injury Prevention and Healing

Injury Prevention and Healing



Don't let your pledge to get into shape be derailed by a sports injury.

Fitness clubs across the country are full of enthusiastic individuals giving it their all to get fit or drop a few pounds. Unfortunately, some of these new athletes try to get too much too quickly, and can pay a painful price.

Recent studies show that acupuncture effectively treats sports injuries such as strains; sprains; neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee and ankle pain; swollen muscles and shin splints.

Acupuncture for Injury Rehabilitation

Acupuncture is well known for its effectiveness in reducing most types of pain, including pain from sports-related injuries. Sports injuries are predominantly due to trauma or overuse syndromes involving the musculoskeletal system and its soft tissues. Trauma to these soft tissues, including ligaments, tendons and muscles are generally the result from falls, blows, sprains/strains, collisions, compressions crushing and disruptions of the healing processes due to inflammation.

Due to its broad range of applications, acupuncture can be used during any of the phases of the injury healing process. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine may be used to help decrease swelling, spasms and inflammation in addition to assisting in pain management, increasing range of motion and promoting healing.

The focus is not only to treat the injury but also to treat any underlying conditions that may predispose an individual to injuries. This is especially important when treating chronic or recurrent injuries that interfere with life activities or athletic performance.

Some sports injuries commonly treated by acupuncture and Oriental medicine include pulled muscles, neck pain, shoulder impingement, tennis elbow, lower back strain, pulled groin, hamstring strain, runner's knee, shin splints, ankle sprain, tendonitis, and arch pain.

If you have suffered an injury or would like to speed your post surgical recovery, acupuncture can help. Call today for more information or to schedule an appointment!

Is Sunscreen Dangerous?

With summer weather here, many of us are spending a lot more time in the sun. For a six billion year old star, the sun has been in the news a lot lately. There seems to be some controversy about sunshine and how much is good for us and whether or not sunscreens are a good idea.

Ultraviolet radiation is part of the electromagnetic light spectrum that reaches the earth from the sun. This light has wavelengths shorter than visible light which makes it invisible to our naked eye. These wavelengths are classified as UVA, UVB, and UVC. Most UVC rays are absorbed by the ozone layer and don't reach the earth.

UVA rays account for up to 95% of the UV radiation that reaches the earth. It penetrates our skin more deeply than UVB and has long been known to play a major role in skin aging. In recent years, studies also now show that UVA damages deeper layers of skin which contributes to, and may even initiate, the development of skin cancers. UVA is the dominant tanning ray, and we know that tanning, whether outdoors or in a salon, causes cumulative damage over time.

Tanning booths primarily emit UVA. The high-pressure sunlamps used in tanning salons emit doses as much as twelve times that of the sun. Not surprisingly, people who use tanning salons are 2.5 times more likely to develop squamous cell carcinoma, and 1.5 times more likely to develop basal cell carcinoma.

Treatment for a sports injury with acupuncture and Oriental medicine has two objectives:

1. Reduce pain and inflammation of the injured area.

There is evidence that acupuncture can aid healing and resolution of injuries, including reducing pain, increasing local microcirculation and attracting white blood cells to the area, both of which speed the healing rate, and aid dispersal of swelling and bruising.

2. Prevent further injuries and enhance athletic performance.

The best way to approach a fitness program without causing injury is not to dive in, but to take it slow and get the joints and muscles you haven't used in a while ready to be used again.

If you suffer a setback in your fitness routine, call for more information about treatment options

UVB rays are less numerous than UVA. These rays are the chief cause of sunburn and they mainly damage the superficial skin layers. They also contribute to skin aging and skin cancers. But, UVB rays are also mostly responsible for helping our skin make Vitamin D.

Vitamin D plays a crucial role in overall health and well being. It is critical to have optimal levels for cardiovascular and immune health, it protects against cancer, helps keep your bones and teeth strong, and has numerous other benefits. Sun exposure allows your body to make Vitamin D in the healthiest form available. The key is to find a healthy balance between getting enough sun exposure and protecting yourself from too much sun and avoiding sunburn.

Most commercial sunscreens interfere with the skin's ability to make Vitamin D and they contain toxic chemicals. Until recently, most sunscreens did not filter out UVA rays. They mostly blocked UVB, ensuring that your body couldn't make Vitamin D.

A 2010 report from the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) joins the growing chorus of voices that question the wisdom of sunscreen use. In the report, EWG states that the ingredients in most sunscreens may raise cancer risk. And that doesn't seem to be the only health problem associated with them. Many widely available sunscreens contain potentially harmful ingredients, some of which are carcinogenic and other ingredients that disrupt hormone balance and generate harmful free radicals.

The synthetic chemicals used in sunscreen can be absorbed into your bloodstream and can cause side effects, like hormone disruption. These chemicals include :

OMC (Octyl methoxycinnamate)

Octocrylene

Oxybenzone

Avobenzone

Homosalate

Octisalate

Octinoxatre

All these chemicals have estrogen-like effects in your body. These effects have been linked to increased cancer rates, cause birth defects in children, lower sperm counts in men, and other medical issues. Many of these same chemicals are also free radical generators, which are implicated in cancer growth. Avoid sunscreen that has Vitamin A (as retinyl palmitate and other forms) in it, also. It seems Vitamin A in sunscreen speeds the development of tumors and skin lesions in laboratory studies.

Worldwide, the greatest rise in melanoma has been found in countries where sunscreens are mostly widely used. Queensland, Australia has more cases of melanoma than anywhere else on earth. Sunscreen has been heavily promoted there. Actually several studies confirm that appropriate sun exposure helps prevent melanoma and other skin cancers. Conversely, commercial sunscreen use can increase skin cancer incidence.

Also, melanoma is more common in indoor workers, and is more common on parts of your body that are not exposed to the sun at all. And, UVB radiation has been found to delay the appearance of melanoma if you are genetically predisposed or prone to skin cancer. So as you see, it's a fine line to get the right balance between enough and too much sun.

The best protection against sun damage is clothing and hats, not sunscreen. Cotton clothing provides about 15 SPF, or about 15 times your skin's normal protection. Just remember even with clothing on, it's still important to monitor your skin for signs of sunburn. Sunburn provides no health benefits, and is never good for you.

It is also very important to gradually acclimate to the sun. Start with 10-20 minutes per day, even less if you have sensitive skin. Sunshine can cause rapid oxidation of your skin, especially if you eat a lot of polyunsaturated fatty acids, which are found in grains, vegetable oils, grain-fed meats, etc.

If you can't control the amount of your sunlight exposure, for example, if you work outside, then by all means use a natural sunscreen that contains either titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. These two substances seem to be safer and block UVA and UVB. For a more complete list of safe sunscreens, please see the www.ewg.org website.

To your continued good health,

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