



David Mortell Licensed Acupuncturist
Pittsburgh Acupuncture Center
5655 Bryant Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
412-363-0886

Acupuncture for Arthritis

May is National Arthritis Month and there's no better time to take action. If you suffer with arthritis, acupuncture can help.

Arthritis is one of the most pervasive diseases in the United States and is the leading cause of disability. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every three Americans (an estimated seventy million people) is affected.



For most people, arthritis pain and inflammation cannot be avoided as the body ages. In fact, most people over the age of fifty show some signs of arthritis as joints degenerate over time. Fortunately, arthritis can often be managed with acupuncture.

What is Arthritis?

Arthritis is not just one disease; it is a complex disorder that comprises more than one hundred distinct symptoms and can affect people at any stage of life. Two of the most common forms of arthritis are osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. While these two forms of arthritis have very different causes, risk factors and effects on the body, they share a common symptom—persistent joint pain.

Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis in the United States. OA begins with the breakdown of joint cartilage, resulting in pain and stiffness. Commonly affected joints include the fingers, knees, hips, and spine. Other joints affected less frequently include the wrists, elbows, shoulders, and ankles. When OA is found in a less frequently affected joint, there is usually a history of injury or unusual stress to that joint. Repetitive injury and physical trauma may contribute to the development of OA. If you have a strenuous job that requires repetitive bending, kneeling, or squatting, for example, you may be at high risk for OA of the knee.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, systemic inflammatory disorder that may affect many tissues and organs, but principally attacks synovial joints. Inflammation of the joint lining, called the synovium, causes pain, stiffness, swelling, warmth, and redness. The affected joint may also lose its shape, resulting in loss of normal movement.

In This Issue

**Acupuncture for Arthritis
Studies on Acupuncture
for Arthritis**

Anti-inflammatory Diet

Anti-inflammatory Diet



Your diet plays a crucial role in helping you avoid or control arthritis.

The first objective of a healthy diet is to help you lose weight if you are overweight. Being overweight can cause additional stress to your joints.

Another way a balanced, varied diet can help ease the pain of arthritis is by providing vitamins and minerals that keep your joints healthy and avoiding “damp” foods such as dairy products and greasy or spicy foods.

Eastern View of Arthritis

In Oriental medicine, arthritis is called "Bi Syndrome." Bi Syndrome manifests as pain, soreness, or numbness of muscles, tendons and joints. Arthritis is treated according to which type of Bi Syndrome it falls into:

1. Moving (Wind) Bi Syndrome: Pain in the joints is widespread and moves from one area of the body to another. This is often accompanied by fever and chills.
2. Stationary (Damp) Bi Syndrome: The pain is localized and does not move. The body and limbs feel heavy and there is numbness and swelling.
3. Painful (Cold) Bi Syndrome: Severe pain in one part, or over one half of the body which becomes worse with cold and diminishes with warmth.
4. Heat Bi Syndrome: The flesh is hot, the area of pain is red and swollen, and the pain increases upon contact.

The type of Bi Syndrome the arthritis falls into will determine which acupuncture points and other treatment options will be utilized. The purpose of acupuncture is to trigger your body's innate ability to self heal. Treatments take all of your symptoms into account and are aimed at balancing the energy within the body, increasing the flow of qi and blood to the affected area, bringing down swelling and inflammation, relieving pain, and helping to prevent re-occurrence of the arthritis.

If you have arthritis and would like to learn more about how acupuncture can help, call now for a consultation.

Studies on Acupuncture for Arthritis

Studies show that acupuncture can stimulate the production of hormones that reduce pain and inflammation.



In a German study, 3,500 people with osteoarthritis of the hip and/or knee received 15 sessions of acupuncture combined with their usual medical care. The results showed that the patients that had acupuncture had less pain and stiffness, improved function and better quality of life than their counterparts who had routine care alone. The improvements occurred immediately after completing a three-month course of acupuncture and lasted for at least another three months, indicating osteoarthritis is among conditions treated with acupuncture.

Another study, published in the journal *Pain*, looked at the effects of acupuncture among 40 adults with osteoarthritis of the knee. Among the patients in the study, those who had a daily acupuncture session for 10 consecutive days reported greater improvement in their pain compared with patients who received a "sham" version of the therapy.

Resources:

Pain Online, December 15, 2009.

Arthritis & Rheumatism, November 2006; vol 54: pp 3485-349

Here are some other healthy and delicious choices to include in your diet.

- **Ginger** - Ginger has been found to be a natural anti-inflammatory. make tea by combining one-half teaspoon of grated ginger root with eight ounces of boiling water. Cover and steep for 10 to 15 minutes, then strain and add honey to taste.

- **Fresh pineapple** - Bromelain, an enzyme in pineapple, reduces inflammation. Be sure the pineapple is fresh, not canned or frozen.

- **Cherries** - Recent research has shown that tart cherries are an excellent source of nutrients that may help to reduce joint pain and inflammation related to arthritis.

- **Fish** - Cold-water fish such as salmon and mackerel contain omega-3 fatty acids, which help keep joints healthy as well as reduce pain and swelling. If you don't care for fish, consider supplementing your diet with fish oil capsules.

- **Turmeric** - Another natural anti-inflammatory. You can sprinkle turmeric on scrambled eggs, add it to soups, or mix it into sauces or salad dressings.

Insulin, Metabolic Syndrome & Heart Health

Hello Everyone,

This month, we will explore the role that insulin plays in maintaining heart health. Insulin is a hormone produced and secreted by the pancreas. Insulin does many things, but its most important job is regulating blood sugar levels. When we eat a meal, some of the food is broken down into glucose and is absorbed through the gut wall into the bloodstream. Our blood sugar levels rise with the added sugars. In an attempt to keep blood sugar levels even, the pancreas secretes insulin into the bloodstream. Insulin binds with the sugar and moves the sugars into cells, thereby reducing blood sugar levels.

Insulin is also our fat storing hormone. After eating, some of the excess blood sugar is converted to fat and is stored in fat cells. Some blood sugar is converted to glycogen and stored in the liver for use when our blood sugars levels fall between meals. In addition to regulating blood glucose levels, insulin also signals the production of cholesterol, makes the kidneys retain fluids, helps regulate blood pressure, and stimulates the growth of smooth muscle cells in the arteries.

In this age of the low-fat diet, the typical American gets 45%, or in some cases much more, of their calories from carbohydrates, mostly in the form of refined sugars and starches. There are two types of carbohydrates, simple and complex. Complex carbohydrates are long chains of sugars which are broken down and digested relatively slowly. They increase blood sugar levels more slowly than simple carbohydrates. Simple, refined carbohydrates, when eaten, are quickly converted to sugars, and quickly absorbed into the bloodstream. This sugar rush causes a sudden spike in blood sugar levels. The pancreas responds by secreting insulin to attempt to bring blood sugar levels down into the normal range. Over time (years to decades, depending on the person), eating a diet high in refined carbohydrates causes our cells to become more and more resistant to insulin. Blood levels of insulin then begin to remain high because our cells have become insensitive to insulin. Blood sugar levels also remain high. Chronically elevated insulin and blood sugar causes metabolic chaos in our bodies that can, and often does, lead to high blood pressure (insulin signals the kidneys to retain fluids and causes a thickening in arterial walls), high cholesterol and triglycerides, obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and increased heart attack and stroke risk. These diseases are responsible for the vast majority of death and disability in the US today. The latest cancer research is also beginning to show a link between many cancers and chronically elevated blood sugar and insulin blood levels.

Some of the symptoms of insulin resistance may seem familiar to you: feeling tired after eating and at other times when you shouldn't; gaining a pound here and there and having trouble losing the added weight; and blood pressure and cholesterol numbers creeping up gradually year after year.

Numerous research studies have implicated elevated glucose levels in the production of dangerous free radicals (no, not Abbie Hoffmann!). Free radicals, molecules with an unpaired electron, react with normal molecules in the body and oxidize them, much the way heat or oxygen can turn butter rancid. When blood glucose is steadily higher than normal it oxidizes more readily. Some of these free radicals oxidize

cholesterol, which then can scar the arteries, setting the stage for heart disease. High levels of blood glucose cause other problems as well. Glucose can bind to proteins and “crosslink” them. This process, called glycosylation, is akin to tying your body's proteins, which include your genes, into knots. We are just beginning to understand the problems this causes, but it is at least a factor in developing scarring and hardening of the arteries and has also been implicated in the development of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

Fructose, which is the sugar naturally found in fruit, is handled by the body in a different way than glucose. Fructose, even in its refined state, does not raise blood sugar and insulin levels like glucose does. It is absorbed through the gut wall and goes directly to the liver, where it is converted into triglycerides for storage as fat. Fruit is a healthy way of ingesting fructose. Highly refined forms of fructose, like that found in high fructose corn syrup are not so healthy to eat. It's a very commonly used sweetener in soda, Gatorade, fruit juices, and flavored teas, and is in virtually every packaged food, including low-fat yogurt. High fructose corn syrup and other similar sugars, like table sugar, directly increase triglyceride and LDL cholesterol levels in the blood, leaving one more at risk for heart disease. White sugar is a combination of glucose and fructose and so has a double whammy effect on your body. The fructose causes the liver to produce triglycerides and the glucose raises blood sugar, causing an increase of insulin. Fructose also contributes to the development of high blood pressure.

Based on what I have read thus far, I have come to a few conclusions about the connection between diet and heart health. Dietary saturated fat and cholesterol do not cause heart disease, obesity, diabetes or high blood pressure. Dietary carbohydrates, particularly refined and quickly digested carbohydrates, through their direct effects on insulin and blood sugar and triglyceride elevation, are the dietary causes of heart disease and related illnesses.

In next month's installment, I will talk more specifically about what I believe makes for a heart healthy diet. I welcome your feedback and comments about this newsletter.

To your continued health,

David Mortell, R.Ac., Dipl.Ac.
Pittsburgh Acupuncture Center
www.pittsburghacupuncturecenter.com
412 363 0886

