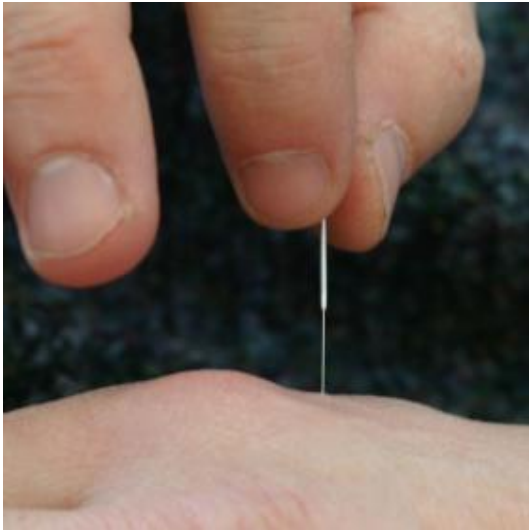


Study: Acupuncture Does Combat Pain



Ancient Chinese medicine is gradually gaining in popularity amongst Westerners. An increasing number of patients across Europe and America are turning to the Chinese deep-needle acupuncture to treat their aches and pains. The therapy has triggered much debate as to the efficiency of acupuncture in treating pains.

Today, science has found that acupuncture can effectively combat pain.

A study conducted by Hull York Medical School has revealed that deep-needle acupuncture could deactivate the brain's limbic system, which is sensitive to pains. This makes the practice anaesthetic.

Experts in neuroscience believe the findings show that acupuncture has a measurable effect on the brain and that the study could help to explain how the treatment can relieve pain. The study, which involved a number of volunteers, will be aired on BBC TV's medical program, *Alternative Medicine: The Evidence*.

Bristol University's Professor Kathy Sykes, who presents the programme, said that brain scanners showed that some acupuncture treatments have a remarkable effect on the brain. "The particular area of the brain that MRI shows deactivation for during acupuncture is part of the pain matrix which is involved in the perception of pain," she said. "It helps someone decide whether something is painful or not. So it could be that acupuncture in some ways changes a person's pain threshold."

The scientists experimented with two variants of acupuncture on two separate sets of volunteers. The first group had needles inserted approximately 1 millimetre deep onto the backs of their hands. The second group were subjected to deep needling, in which needles are inserted to a depth of 1 centimetre at well-known acupuncture points, also on the back of the hand. Brain scans of the group undergoing 'superficial needling' showed activation of the motor areas of the cortex, a normal reaction to pain.

Professor Tony Wildsmith of the University of Dundee, a pain relief expert said it was quite possible that the findings were valid. However, he also said, "The thing about acupuncture is that it does not work on everyone. It is more likely to be effective if you believe it. I think it is a psychological manipulation technique, a distraction. We are not going to get to the stage where this could be used instead of a general anaesthetic."

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