

The Evidence for Acupuncture Efficacy



As a profession, Chinese Medicine practitioners in Australia are operating within a legal framework. We are registered under the jurisdiction the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Agency (AHPRA). Under AHPRA's Advertising Guidelines we are not allowed to use testimonials, we are not allowed to create an unreasonable expectation of beneficial treatment and we are not allowed to make claims which are not supported by reputable scientific evidence.

Acupuncture has been used for thousands of years to treat a wide variety of conditions. Not all of these conditions have established an acceptable level of scientific evidence for efficacy, however the landscape is changing dramatically as more and more studies are published demonstrating evidence of acupuncture's effectiveness. The following categories provide a summary of the current status of acupuncture evidence. But please keep in mind that 'lack of evidence of efficacy' is not the same thing as 'evidence of lack of efficacy'.

Level One - Evidence of Positive Effect

This level of evidence demonstrates consistent, statistically significant, positive effect:

- Allergic rhinitis (perennial & seasonal)
- Chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (with anti-emetics)
- Chronic low back pain
- Headache (tension-type and chronic)
- Knee osteoarthritis
- Migraine prophylaxis
- Postoperative nausea & vomiting
- Postoperative pain

Level Two - Evidence of Potential Positive Effect

Conditions with this level of evidence have moderate support of efficacy, but insufficient to make definitive conclusions:

- Acute low back pain
- Acute stroke
- Ambulatory anaesthesia
- Obesity
- Anxiety
- Aromatase-inhibitor-induced arthralgia
- Asthma in adults

- Back or pelvic pain during pregnancy
- Cancer pain
- Cancer-related fatigue
- Constipation
- Craniotomy anaesthesia
- Depression (with antidepressants)
- Dry eye
- Hypertension (with medication)
- Insomnia
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Labour pain
- Lateral elbow pain
- Menopausal hot flushes
- Modulating sensory perception thresholds
- Neck pain
- Perimenopausal & postmenopausal insomnia
- Plantar heel pain
- Post-stroke insomnia
- Post-stroke shoulder pain
- Post-stroke spasticity
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Prostatitis pain/chronic pelvic pain syndrome
- Recovery after colorectal cancer resection
- Restless leg syndrome
- Schizophrenia (with antipsychotics)
- Sciatica
- Shoulder impingement syndrome (early stage) (with exercise)
- Shoulder pain
- Smoking cessation (up to 3 months)
- Stroke rehabilitation
- Temporomandibular pain

Level Three - Weak or Unclear Evidence of Efficacy

This level of evidence is applied to conditions that have not yet shown clear, consistent results. Keep in mind that any single study demonstrating a positive effect is insufficient; it is only after a series of consistent studies that science will draw a positive conclusion.

- Acupuncture in Emergency Department
- Acute ankle sprain in adults
- Alzheimer's disease
- Angina pectoris
- Assisted conception in ART
- Asthma in children
- Atopic dermatitis
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- Bell's palsy
- Bladder pain syndrome
- Cancer-related insomnia
- Cancer-related psychological symptoms
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Chronic kidney disease

- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Chronic urinary retention due to spinal cord injury
- Chronic urticaria
- Dysmenorrhoea
- Dyspepsia in diabetic gastroparesis (DGP)
- Erectile dysfunction
- Exercise performance & post-exercise recovery
- Fatigue in systemic lupus erythematosus
- Fibromyalgia
- Functional dyspepsia
- Gag reflex in dentistry
- Glaucoma
- Heart failure
- Hot flushes in breast cancer
- Hyperemesis gravidarum
- Hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy in neonates
- Induction of labour
- Inflammatory bowel disease
- Itch
- Lumbar spinal stenosis
- Melasma
- Meniere's disease/syndrome
- Menopausal syndrome
- Multiple sclerosis
- Mumps in children
- Myelosuppression after chemotherapy
- Oocyte retrieval pain relief
- Opiate addiction
- Opioid detoxification
- Parkinson's disease
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome
- Poor sperm quality
- Postnatal depression
- Postoperative gastroparesis syndrome (PGS)
- Postoperative ileus
- Post-stroke hiccoughs
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Primary ovarian insufficiency
- Primary Sjogren's syndrome
- Psoriasis vulgaris
- Rheumatoid arthritis Slowing progression of myopia
- Spinal cord injury
- Stress urinary incontinence in adults
- Sudden sensorineural hearing loss
- Surgery analgesia
- Tinnitus
- Traumatic brain injury
- Urinary incontinence
- Uterine fibroids
- Vascular cognitive impairment without dementia
- Vascular dementia
- Whiplash associated disorder (WAD)
- Xerostomia in cancer

Level Four - Little or No Evidence

The quality of the evidence for the following conditions is consistently low or very low. Further research required.

- Alcohol dependence
- Epilepsy
- Cocaine addiction
- Nausea in pregnancy
- Smoking cessation (more than 6 months)

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