

Can acupuncture reduce headaches?

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Acupuncture may reduce headaches for people who have chronic tension-type headaches, according to a study published in the June 22, 2022, online issue of *Neurology*.

Tension-type [headaches](#) most often involve a pressing or tightening

feeling on both sides of the head with mild to moderate intensity. These headaches are not worsened by physical activity, and do not include nausea. Tension-type headaches are considered chronic when they occur at least 15 days per month.

"Tension-type headaches are one of the most common types of headaches and people who have a lot of these headaches may be looking for alternatives to medication," said study author Ying Li, MD, Ph.D., of Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Chengdu, China. "Our study found that [acupuncture](#) reduces the average number of headache days per month for those struggling with these painful and disruptive headache attacks."

The study involved 218 people who were diagnosed with chronic tension-type headaches. They had chronic tension-type headaches for an average of 11 years and had 22 days per month with headaches on average. Participants were randomly assigned to receive either true acupuncture or superficial acupuncture. True acupuncture treatments involved achieving a deqi sensation, which involves placing and moving a needle in the body to reach a tingling, numbness, or heaviness feeling. The superficial treatments had a lesser depth in the body to avoid achieving the deqi sensation. Both groups received two or three sessions per week, for a total of 20 sessions, for two months and were followed for an additional six months.

The main result measured in the study was a reduction of at least 50% in the number of days with headaches. All participants had clinic visits every four weeks. They also used headache diaries to record their symptoms and use of acute medications.

At the end of the study, 68% of the people receiving true acupuncture reported at least a 50% reduction in the monthly number of headache days compared to 50% of the people who received superficial

acupuncture.

Researchers found the number of monthly headache days gradually decreased after treatment, in both those who received true acupuncture treatments and superficial acupuncture treatments. For those who received true acupuncture, headache days decreased from 20 days per month at the beginning of the study to seven days per month by the end of the study. For those who received superficial acupuncture, [headache](#) days decreased from 23 days per month at the beginning of the study to 12 days per month at the end of the study.

The only side effects from the treatment were mild and did not require treatment.

"While this study showed that acupuncture can reduce headaches, more research is needed to determine the longer-term effectiveness of acupuncture and how it compares to other [treatment options](#)," said Li. "In comparing treatment options, cost-effectiveness is another important factor to evaluate."

A limitation of the study was that the research was conducted in one hospital, so the results may not apply to all populations.

More information: Hui Zheng et al, Acupuncture for Patients With Chronic Tension-Type Headache: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Neurology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1212/WNL.0000000000200670](https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0000000000200670)

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