Acupuncture for Prostatitis Treatment

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese medicine practice that is based on the theory that qi (chi), or life energy, flows through the body in invisible channels called meridians. Sometime this energy becomes blocked, and this disruption in the energy flow leads to illness.

Practitioners access the meridians at certain points of the body, called acupoints, by inserting very fine needles into the skin. This stimulates specific acupoints and can be used for a range of conditions, including CPPS. Stimulating these points is believed to enhance the body’s function and promote the body’s own healing.

Many people are nervous about trying acupuncture because it involves needles, but acupuncture should not be painful when administered by a professional. You may be apprehensive during your first treatment because of previous experiences with much thicker hypodermic needles. Acupuncture needles, however, are extremely thin as well as single-use, factory-sterilized, and disposable.

You may feel temporary discomfort when undergoing dry needling through tender muscular trigger points. Once the needles are left alone for about 20 minutes the discomfort disappears and then acupuncture can actually be very relaxing. Occasionally men with prostatitis and pelvic pain experience temporary exacerbation of their condition or minor flare-ups of old conditions following their first few treatments. After the third treatment or so this also disappears.

How Does It Work?

The Western view of acupuncture is that it works by stimulating the central nervous system to release hormones and neurotransmitters that can boost the immune system, dull pain, and help regulate various body functions. Many studies have looked at the use of acupuncture for relieving pain, urinary symptoms, stress, and quality of life for prostatitis patients, and the results have been encouraging.

Since it is difficult to use a placebo with acupuncture, researchers use sham acupuncture. That means patients that patients are told they are receiving acupuncture when they are actually being “poked” at site that are not acupoints and thus not receiving any treatment.

Acupuncture is part of my NPAT/CPPS Treatment Program, and I have established a specialized technique that involves the following three things:
1. Dry needling of muscular trigger points
2. Needling other points known to help with prostatitis—most of which are highlighted on the below studies
3. Inserting needles on “stress points”
When treating prostatitis, first I identify muscle pelvic trigger points. Trigger points are hyperirritable points that are located in taut bands of either skeletal muscle or fascia. When compressed, the trigger points cause local tenderness and referred pain. When identifying such points, a dry needle is inserted into the skin and muscle directly at a myofascial trigger point. Then other traditional acupoints for prostatitis are identified and treated as well. Men typically need 6 to 12 acupuncture treatments, performed once or twice a week, before they experience results.

You have already learned that stress is linked to prostatitis and can make your symptoms worse. The good news is that acupuncture can help relieve stress. A recent study demonstrates that acupuncture inhibits the excess release of stress chemicals, illustrating how the acupuncture helps relieve stress.

The latest of a series of studies from Georgetown University Medical Center was published in April 2013. Researchers used electroacupuncture on rats to study the levels of proteins and hormones that humans and rodents secrete that are involved in the stress response. Electroacupuncture was chosen because it allowed researchers to make sure each animal received the same dose.

The 10-day experiment involved a control group that was not stressed and did not receive acupuncture; a group that was stressed each day for an hour and did not receive acupuncture; a group that was stressed and received sham acupuncture near the tail; and the experimental group, which was stressed and received acupuncture on the Zusanli spot, which is reported to relieve stress. For humans this location is below the knee.

The electroacupuncture blocked the chronic stress-induced elevations of hormones and NPY, a peptide secreted by the sympathetic nervous system. The NPY levels were reduced in the experimental group close to the level of the controls. The rats who received the sham acupuncture experienced an elevation of the hormones similar to that of the stress-only animals. The rats who were stressed and did not receive acupuncture to the Zusanli spot had high levels of NPY. Thus this experiment suggested that using acupuncture to reduce stress may help men with stress-induced prostatitis.

Other studies that involved acupuncture for prostatitis include the following:

- The American Journal of Medicine evaluated the use of acupuncture versus sham acupuncture. In the study, 89 men with CPPS were arbitrarily assigned to undergo either actual or sham acupuncture two times per week for a total of 10 weeks. Each session lasted half an hour. At the end of the study, 32 (73%) of the 44 men who had real acupuncture responded favorably, compared with 21 (47%) of the 45 men in the sham group. The findings were based on reactions to the National Institutes of Health Chronic Prostatitis Symptom Index [NIH/CPSI]. Also, 14 (32%) of the men who had real acupuncture still showed favorable signs six months after completing the study compared to only 6 (13%) in the sham group.
• A Canadian study sought to establish if acupuncture could have a positive impact on trouble with urination, pain, and overall quality of life in men with CPPS. The study involved 12 men who had not previously responded to standard treatment, such as antibiotics, anti-inflammatory medications, or alpha-blockers. The men had acupuncture twice per week for six weeks. Thirty acupuncture points were addressed during each session. Based on NIH/CPSI scores, the 12 men saw marked progress with regard to pain, urinary symptoms, and quality of life after approximately 33 weeks of follow-up. According to the study’s authors, “Acupuncture appears to be a safe, effective, and durable treatment in improving symptoms in, and the quality of life” of men with CPPS that has not responded to previous treatment.

• An August 2011 review of the benefits of acupuncture for CPPS stated there is “increasing evidence that acupuncture could be a safe and effective treatment” in managing this disease. The reviewers said their assessment of clinical research of acupuncture for CP/CPPS “could encourage healthcare providers and urologists to apply acupuncture for managing pains of CP/CPPS with standard treatment.”

• A study that was published in 2009 involved 39 men with CPPS who were randomly put into three groups: group one exercised, had 12 sessions of electroacupuncture (EA), and were given advice; group two exercised, received 12 sessions of sham EA, and were given advice; and group three exercised and received advice. Six acupuncture points were targeted. After six weeks, EA group experienced significant improvements in their pain-related symptoms. All 12 men in the EA group had at least a six-point drop in their score, compared with two in the sham group (16.7%) and three in the remaining group (25%).

• A Columbia University study involved 10 men with CPPS who had gotten no relief from other treatments. The men received ear and full-body acupuncture twice a week for six weeks. After three and six weeks the men reported less pain, and they retained that measure of relief for another six weeks after treatment ended.

• A meta-analysis was conducted in China and published in 2008. That review involved 13 case-control studies on acupuncture for CPPS before August 2007 and involved a total of 861 cases and 738 controls. Overall, the effectiveness and cure rates were significantly higher among men who had acupuncture than among controls.

**Side Effects**

Acupuncture is considered a safe alternative to treatment with medication. Side effects are rare and may include bacterial infections at the site of needle insertion. This would relate to poor training and hygiene of the acupuncturist. The most common infection reported from acupuncture is hepatitis. Look for qualified practitioners who use Clean Needle Technique. Serious adverse events are rare but may occur.

As NPAT demonstrates, acupuncture treatment for prostatitis can be combined with other therapies.