Medical acupuncture for the treatment of musculoskeletal pain.

Acupuncture is one of the oldest forms of alternative medicine. It involves insertion of fine needles through the skin at certain points on the body surface for a therapeutic effect. The term acupuncture derives from two latin roots, acus - meaning needle, and puncture, meaning to puncture (Pyne and Shenker 2008).

The advantages of using acupuncture are well documented and include an immediate reduction in local, referred and widespread pain, restoration of range of motion and muscle activation patterns, and normalisation of the immediate chemical environment of active myofascial trigger points (Dommerholt 2011).

Medical acupuncture does not involve the concepts of qi, yin, yang or meridians, and claims to be part of conventional medicine. Although the technique is an adaptation of traditional Chinese medicine, it has its own theoretical concepts, terminology, needling procedure and therapeutic application.

Neurophysiological mechanisms of acupuncture in pain control

The mechanisms are overly complex and involve peripheral, segmental and central neural networks.
Medical acupuncture is based on the current understanding of human anatomy, physiology and pathology and the principles of evidence-based medicine. The practice involve the inception of dry needles into trigger points to produce a clinical effect, alleviate musculoskeletal pain including myofascial pain syndromes.

However, the exact mechanism of action underlying the effects of acupuncture is still not fully clarified and an unified theory based on scientific evidence is lacking.

I am trained in medical acupuncture, and I use acupuncture as an adjunct to my osteopathic skills. Where I feel acupuncture would be appropriate, I discuss it with my patients to obtain informed consent – the choice is always the patient's. I found that acupuncture is useful to effect muscle relaxation, and can often do so without the soreness that may accompany soft tissue techniques. Typically I use four or more sterile ultra-fine needles, and I may leave them in the body for a few minutes. Once removed, I may then use other manual techniques to encourage the tissue changes desired.

References

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