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Contact: Jennifer Beal

[wbnewseurope@wiley.com](mailto:wbnewseurope@wiley.com)

44-012-437-70633

[Wiley-Blackwell](#)

## **Acupuncture stops headaches, but 'faked' treatments work almost as well**

Headache sufferers can benefit from acupuncture, even though how and where acupuncture needles are inserted may not be important. Two separate systematic reviews by Cochrane Researchers show that acupuncture is an effective treatment for prevention of headaches and migraines. But the results also suggest that faked procedures, in which needles are incorrectly inserted, can be just as effective.

"Much of the clinical benefit of acupuncture might be due to non-specific needling effects and powerful placebo effects, meaning selection of specific needle points may be less important than many practitioners have traditionally argued," says lead researcher of both studies, Klaus Linde, who works at the Centre for Complementary Medicine Research at the Technical University of Munich, Germany.

In each study, the researchers tried to establish whether acupuncture could reduce the occurrence of headaches. One study focused on mild to moderate but frequent 'tension-type' headaches, whilst the other focused on more severe but less frequent headaches usually termed migraines. Together the two studies included 33 trials, involving a total of 6,736 patients.

Overall, following a course of at least eight weeks, patients treated with acupuncture suffered fewer headaches compared to those who were given only pain killers. In the migraine study, acupuncture was superior to proven prophylactic drug treatments, but faked treatments were no less effective. In the tension headache study, true acupuncture was actually slightly more effective than faked treatments.

The results indicate that acupuncture could be used as an alternative for those patients who prefer not to use drug treatments, and additionally may result in fewer side effects. However, Linde says more research is still required, "Doctors need to know how long improvements

associated with acupuncture will last and whether better trained acupuncturists really achieve better results than those with basic training only."

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