

Study finds acupuncture lowers hypertension by activating natural opioids

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The UCI study shows that repetitive electroacupuncture evokes a long-lasting action in lowering blood pressure in hypertension. Credit: Chris Nugent / UCI

UC Irvine Susan Samueli Center for Integrative Medicine researchers report that regular electroacupuncture treatment can lower hypertension

by increasing the release of a kind of opioid in the brainstem region that controls blood pressure.

In tests on rats, UCI cardiology researcher Zhi-Ling Guo and colleagues noted that reduced [blood pressure](#) lasted for at least three days after electroacupuncture by increasing the gene expression of enkephalins, which one of the three major opioid peptides produced by the body.

Their study, which appears in the Nature's *Scientific Reports*, presents the first evidence of the molecular activity behind electroacupuncture's hypertension-lowering benefits.

Last year, the UCI team reported patients treated with acupuncture at certain wrist locations experienced drops in their blood pressure. The present study shows that repetitive electroacupuncture evokes a long-lasting action in lowering blood pressure in hypertension, suggesting that this therapy may be suitable for treating clinical hypertension.

Hypertension affects about one third of the adult population of the world, and its consequences, such as stroke and heart attacks, are enormous public health problems, and the potential advantages of acupuncture over conventional medical therapy include few, if any, of side effects.

More information: Min Li et al. Repetitive Electroacupuncture Attenuates Cold-Induced Hypertension through Enkephalin in the Rostral Ventral Lateral Medulla, *Scientific Reports* (2016). [DOI: 10.1038/srep35791](https://doi.org/10.1038/srep35791)

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