

Study points to acupuncture to reduce period pain

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A study conducted by researchers from Western Sydney University and the University of Auckland has shown that acupuncture treatment significantly reduces period pain intensity, duration and symptoms over

time, with improvements being sustained up to a year after treatment.

Primary Dysmenorrhea (period [pain](#)) is the most common gynaecological complaint in menstruating [women](#) with up to four in five women suffering at some stage during their reproductive years.

The pilot study involved 74 women aged 18-45 years with suspected or confirmed primary dysmenorrhea and no known cause of secondary dysmenorrhea from Auckland and Wellington in New Zealand.

Over half the women receiving manual [acupuncture](#) had a least a 50 per cent reduction in their severity of period pain over the three months of treatment.

The paper published in the international journal *PLOS ONE*, also shows a connection between both the treatment timing and frequency, with high frequency of treatment providing greater improvements in health-related quality of life, such as overall physical component, vitality, social function, and bodily pain.

A reduction in pain relief medication when using manual acupuncture compared to electro-acupuncture was also found.

The randomised controlled trial was led by Dr Mike Armour, ([opens in new window](#)) postdoctoral research fellow from NICM ([opens in new window](#)) with fellow researchers from NICM, Western Sydney University and the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Auckland.

Dr Armour says the results are promising and with further larger trials may lead to the development of evidence-based guidelines for acupuncture in the treatment of period pain and its associated symptoms.

"Pragmatic trials of acupuncture have shown a reduction in pain intensity and an improvement in quality of life in women with period pain, however evidence has been limited for how changing the 'dosage' of acupuncture might affect the outcome," says Dr Armour.

"Our pilot study found that using manual stimulation of the needles, rather than an electrical pulse, commonly used in many Chinese studies for period pain, resulted in reduced need for pain relieving medication and improvement in secondary symptoms such as headaches and nausea. The latter was unexpected and will be explored further in future, larger trials."

Women in the trial kept a menstrual diary and were given individualised acupuncture treatments after being randomly assigned to one of four treatment groups: high frequency manual acupuncture, low frequency manual acupuncture, high frequency electro acupuncture and [low frequency](#) electro acupuncture.

Twelve treatments were performed over three menstrual cycles, either once per week ([low frequency](#) groups) or three times in the week prior to their period ([high frequency](#) groups). All groups received a [treatment](#) in the first 48 hours of their period.

All treatments were determined based on Chinese Medicine diagnosis. A manualised protocol was used which allowed selection from a number of suitable acupuncture points based on the Chinese Medicine diagnosis.

More information: Mike Armour et al. The role of treatment timing and mode of stimulation in the treatment of primary dysmenorrhea with acupuncture: An exploratory randomised controlled trial, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0180177](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0180177)

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