

Ear acupuncture with beads may help with shedding pounds

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Ear acupuncture using metal beads can help reduce weight, body mass index (BMI), and body fat in combination with a restricted diet, according to new research being presented at this year's [European Congress on Obesity](#) (ECO) in Dublin, Ireland (May 17-20).

The study by Dr. Takahiro Fujimoto from Clinic F, Tokyo, Japan and colleagues suggests that [food cravings](#) can be controlled using the simpler method of acupuncture stimulation with beads rather than the traditional use of intradermal needles, which requires expert acupuncturists.

"Since these tiny metal beads are attached to six points on the outer ear that stimulate nerves and organs which regulate appetite, satiety and hunger, this type of acupuncture does not require complex knowledge or skill," explains Dr. Fujimoto. "In Japan, this method to aid [weight loss](#) has been used for over 30 years."

In traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture is based on the understanding that your health depends on the flow of qi (energy) in your body.

This energy travels along invisible pathways, known as meridians, that are found throughout your body, including your ears. A blocked or disrupted flow of qi can have a negative effect on your physical and mental health.

Auricular (ear) acupuncture therapy is based on the theory that the outer ear represents all parts of the body. Thin needles or beads are placed on certain points, usually along meridian lines, to restore the flow of qi by resolving any blockages or disruption and may help with a variety of health conditions.

The approach has been used to treat drug addiction and to help people

give up smoking and lose weight.

While the mechanism is unclear, studies suggest that ear acupuncture may help to regulate the endocrine system, modulate metabolism, promote digestion, and lessen oxidative stress.

This new study builds on previous research in Japanese women with overweight or obesity which found that those treated with ear acupuncture with beads lost significantly more weight than those who were untreated, and this weight loss was maintained for 6 months after the end of treatment.

The new study in 81 Japanese men living with overweight or obesity (aged 21 to 78; average BMI 28.4 kg/m²) with high levels of unhealthy abdominal fat assessed auricular acupuncture with 1.5 mm metal ear beads on six points of the [outer ear](#)—shen-men, food pipe, upper stomach opening, stomach, lungs and endocrine system.

The beads were placed on both ears and kept in place using surgical tape to ensure the participants were continuously receiving uniform pressure on each of the six acupuncture points. The beads were replaced twice a week during hospital visits. At the same time, participants were given guidance on diet and [body weight](#) was measured.

Participants were asked to reduce their total food intake by half during the 3 months of their treatment and kept food diaries.

All participants were weighed and measured at the start and end of treatment, including body weight, body fat percentage, [fat mass](#), lean mass, muscle mass, BMI, and abdominal fat to see what impact auricular acupuncture with beads might have.

The study found substantial differences after 3 months, with participants

losing on average 10.4 cm off their [waist circumference](#) (from an average 98.4 cm at the start of the study to 88 cm) and 4% of total body fat (from average 28.2% to 24.3%).

Measures of unhealthy abdominal body fat also fell by on average 2 points (from 15.2 at the start of the study to 13 after 3 months—evaluated on a scale of 1 to 59; with a healthy visceral fat rating between 1 and 12, and excessive levels between 13 and 59), and BMI decreased by almost 3 points (average BMI 28.4kg/m² to 25.5 kg/m²)

"Our findings suggest that acupuncture on the ear may aid weight loss when paired with diet and exercise," says Dr. Fujimoto. "It's likely that [acupuncture](#) has a positive effect by curbing cravings and appetite, improving digestion, and boosting metabolism."

The authors note several limitations, including that it is an observational study in a small group of Japanese men over a short time period and can't prove causation.

Provided by European Association for the Study of Obesity

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