

Everyone knows exercise is good for you, but taking part in fitness activities or sports can lead to injury. Sports injuries can be caused by accidents, lack of fitness, poor training practices, improper gear or failure to warm up.

Sports injuries fall into two general types. Acute traumatic injuries occur suddenly and usually involve a single application of force, for example, a hard tackle in football. They include fractures, breaks, bruises, sprains, strains and abrasions. Chronic or overuse injuries, by contrast, happen over a period of time. These injuries are usually the result of training that involves repetitive movements, such as running or serving a ball in tennis. Common types include shin splints and tendonitis. While it may be tempting to ignore overuse injuries as minor, seeking treatment is advised, as, left untreated, chronic injuries tend to get worse.

Injured athletes who receive acupuncture are often able to return to training more quickly than would otherwise be possible, and the treatment is therefore used by top sports people and athletes, including the British Rugby team, many Premiership football teams and the British Olympic team, to treat musculoskeletal problems.

Since keeping the body in balance promotes more efficient training, acupuncture is also increasingly being used to enhance athletic performance.

How acupuncture can help

Acupuncture stimulates the nervous system and causes the release of chemical messenger molecules. The resulting biochemical changes influence the body's self-regulating systems, stimulating its natural healing abilities.

Research has shown that acupuncture treatment can promote resolution of injuries by:

- providing pain relief (Pomeranz, 1987).
- increasing local microcirculation (Komori et al, 2009) which aids dispersal of swelling and bruising.
- suppression of the peripheral inflammatory response (Kim et al, 2008) and other anti-inflammatory mechanisms (Kavoussi & Ross, 2007, Zijlstra et al , 2003).
- breaking down scar tissue – controlled microtrauma causes a local inflammatory response, which initiates reabsorption of inappropriate fibrosis or excessive scar tissue and facilitates a cascade of healing activities resulting in remodeling of affected soft tissue structures.
- promoting faster recovery after training sessions (Pan & Pan, 2007).

Acupuncture can be effectively combined with other treatments such as massage and rehabilitation exercises.

Sports injuries

Research

Conclusion

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