

# Migraine headaches



Migraine is the world's sixth most debilitating illness. Can Acupuncture offer sufferers help?  
Amanda Hair answers for **CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine)**.

If you have experienced a migraine, you will know that it's not like just having a bad headache. It's best described as an incapacitating collection of neurological symptoms, whereby the sufferer can experience visual disturbances, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, extreme sensitivity to sound, light, touch and smells, and tingling or numbness in the extremities or face.

Migraines seem to disproportionately affect women. Interestingly, boys are affected more than girls before puberty but, during adolescence, women experience more migraines, more than likely connected to shifting hormones.

With increasing research evidence that typical painkillers and migraine pharmaceuticals can actually aggravate the condition, some people choose to explore alternatives, such as Acupuncture.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) include in their headache guideline (updated 2015) that a course of up to 10 sessions of acupuncture may be offered if western pharmacology 'isn't suitable' or 'doesn't work well for a particular patient'.

An Acupuncturist will diagnose migraine headaches through a series of differentiating signs and symptoms; for example, the nature

and location of the pain, frequency, duration and triggering or aggravating factors. Once a diagnosis is reached, very fine Acupuncture needles are placed in specific Acupuncture points along channels, which relate to the major organs within the body, called meridians. It's a very common occurrence for the liver organ and associated channel to be activated as these are related to a woman's menstrual cycle. Acupuncture needles may also be placed locally on the scalp or retained in the ear using 'seeds'. The needles are retained for up to 25 minutes, during which time many people experience an extreme sense of relaxation.

In the UK, the Migraine Trust endorses Acupuncture as a viable alternative to western medication. In one study, patients suffering with chronic headache (80% with migraine) were given 12 sessions of Acupuncture over 3 months. This resulted in 34% fewer headache days, 15% less medication, 15% fewer days off work and 25% fewer GP visits after one year.

You can, however, dramatically improve these results by looking at your migraines holistically. If you choose an Acupuncturist who has also been trained in Naturopathy, they will have an additional set of diagnostic lenses through which to see someone's illness. As well as tongue and pulse diagnosis, they will use Iridology, which identifies illness via the iris of the eye.

We know that there are many triggers for migraines, such as certain foods, alcohol, stress, hormones, and weather. A Naturopathic Acupuncturist will help you identify triggers specific to you, so you can get to the root cause of your problem. This is a fundamental principle of Naturopathy, to help ensure problems do not recur.

Naturopathic Acupuncturists also understand how toxins overload the body and

how these can be eliminated using a range of appropriate natural techniques such as Nutrition, Herbal Medicine and Homeopathic remedies. They will tailor-make a naturopathic plan for you that not only includes Acupuncture, but supportive dietary and lifestyle advice, so that you can address all the issues that may be contributing to your migraines.

So if you suffer from debilitating migraines, Naturopathic Acupuncture may be an appropriate therapy for you to explore.

If you'd like to find out more about training with CNM as a Naturopathic Acupuncturist, a highly rewarding career which gives you the chance to make a difference in people's lives, come along to an Open Evening at CNM.



Amanda Hair lectures in  
Acupuncture at CNM  
Bristol.

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