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## **Treating Autoimmune Diseases with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine**

Autoimmune diseases are a group of disorders in which the immune system attacks the body and destroys or alters tissues. There are more than eighty serious chronic illnesses in this category including rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, lupus, thyroid disease, inflammatory bowel disease, Addison's disease, pernicious anemia, celiac disease, multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis and Guillain-Barré syndrome. According to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA) twenty percent of the population suffers from autoimmune disorders. Each disease appears uncommon on an individual basis but, as a group, the disorders make up the fourth-largest cause of disability among women.

Due to the complexity of treating autoimmune disorders, integrative medicine solutions including acupuncture and Oriental medicine have received much attention as successful therapies in their treatment particularly for use in providing pain relief, regulating the immune system, managing symptoms and improving overall quality of life.

### **What Causes Autoimmune Disease?**

Under normal conditions, an immune response cannot be triggered against the cells of one's own body. In certain cases, however, immune cells make a mistake and attack the very cells that they are meant to protect. This can lead to a variety of autoimmune diseases which encompass a broad category of over 100 diseases in which the person's immune system attacks his or her own tissue.

The exact mechanisms causing these changes are not completely understood, but bacteria, viruses, toxins, and some drugs may play a role in triggering an autoimmune process in someone who already has a genetic (inherited) predisposition to develop such a disorder. It is theorized that the inflammation initiated by these agents, toxic or infectious, somehow provokes in the body a "sensitization" (autoimmune reaction) in the involved tissues.

As the disease develops vague symptoms start to appear, such as joint and muscle pain, general muscle weakness, possible rashes or low-grade fever, trouble concentrating, or weight loss. The following symptoms may point toward something being wrong: numbness and tingling in hands and feet, dry eyes, hair loss, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, or repeated miscarriages can also be caused by an autoimmune response.

### **How Acupuncture Treats Autoimmune Disorders**

According to Oriental medicine, autoimmune disorders occur when there is imbalance within the body. Imbalance can come from an excess or deficiency of yin and yang that disrupts the flow of Qi, or vital energy, through the body. Acupuncture is used to help the body restore balance, treating the root of the disorder, while specifically addressing the symptoms that are unique to each individual.

Clinical research has shown that acupuncture causes physical responses in nerve cells, the pituitary gland, and parts of the brain. These responses can cause the body to release proteins, hormones, and brain chemicals that control a number of body functions. It is proposed that, by these actions, acupuncture affects

blood pressure, body temperature and the immune system.

In addition to acupuncture, your treatment program to manage your autoimmune disorder may involve a combination of therapies including stress reducing exercises, moderate physical activity, herbal medicine and nutritional support.

**Learn more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be safely and effectively incorporated into treating autoimmune disorders, call for a consultation today!**

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## Acupuncture for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disorder that can affect many different joints and, in some people, other parts of the body as well, including the blood, the lungs, and the heart. Inflammation of the joint lining, called the synovium, can cause pain, stiffness, swelling, warmth, and redness. The affected joint may also lose its shape, resulting in loss of normal movement. Rheumatoid arthritis can last a long time and can be a disease of flares (active symptoms) and remissions (few to no symptoms).

According to Oriental medical theory, arthritis arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes blocked. This blockage is called, "bi" type pain and is widely studied and successfully treated using a combination of acupuncture and/or Chinese herbs.

Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine have been found to be extremely effective at treating the pain and inflammation associated with all types of arthritis. The acupuncture points and herbs that are used depend on if the blockage of Qi (arthritis) is caused by the pathogen wind, cold, damp or damp-heat.

**Call today to learn how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be incorporated into your treatment plan for rheumatoid arthritis!**

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## 6 Nutrients to Support Your Immune System

A class of plant chemicals known as bioflavonoids has been found to dramatically reduce inflammation and improve symptoms associated with autoimmune disorders. Here are six that can be found in everyday foods.

**Carotenoids** - A family of plant pigments that include beta-carotene. A lack of carotenoids in the diet is thought to promote inflammation. Good sources of carotenoids include apricots, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato, spinach, kale, butternut squash, and collard greens.

**Fiber** - A healthy and active colon can decrease food sensitivity, which, in turn, can lighten the burden on your immune system. For maximum autoimmune health, increase the fiber in your diet.

**Flavonoids** - Found in green and black teas both catechins and theaflavins are beneficial in autoimmune disease.

**Ginger** - Recent studies show that ginger reduces inflammation by inhibiting prostaglandin and suppresses the immune system's production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines, reducing disease severity in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

**Omega-3** - These essential fatty acids found in cold water fish such as salmon or mackerel and flaxseed oil can counter the formation of chemicals that cause inflammation.

**Quercetin** - Found naturally in certain foods quercetin can reduce allergic reactions and decrease inflammation. Foods rich in quercetin include apples (skin on), berries, red grapes, red onions, capers, and black tea.