

# Acupuncture can help relieve knee pain

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Acupuncturist Dr Ben Lian, from Meridian Acupuncture Health Centre, says acupuncture can be very effective for treating certain types of knee pain.

The knee is one of the most often-examined sites among GPs and the most-often treated anatomical site by specialists, following complaints of pain.

The knee, the largest joint in the body, comprises the lower end of the thigh bone, the upper end of the shin bone, the kneecap, muscles, tendons, ligaments and cartilage.

Because of its size and complexity, it is one of the most frequently injured joints, usually from either trauma, infections or arthritis. Being overweight can also contribute, by straining ligaments and cartilage.

## WHO SUFFERS FROM KNEE PAIN?

Many athletes injure their knees, particularly the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and medial collateral ligament (MCL). Knee pain isn't restricted to professional athletes, however. As people age, the amount of cartilage in the knee decreases, and many ligaments lose elasticity, making them more susceptible to pain and/or injury.

## WHAT CAN ACUPUNCTURE DO?

Studies show acupuncture can relieve certain types of knee pain, especially arthritic conditions.

A 1999 study comparing electro-acupuncture to ice massage and transcutaneous nerve stimulation (TENS) for subjects with osteoarthritis found that acupuncture decreased pain and stiffness levels and increased muscle strength and knee flexion.

Smaller studies confirmed that acupuncture is beneficial in reducing knee pain, stiffness and physical disability in patients with knee and knee-related problems. It can ease the discomfort some feel while waiting for knee surgery, and in some cases, may be considered an alternative.

“As with any other form of care, however, not all patients will respond to acupuncture,” says Ben. “Discuss the situation thoroughly with your acupuncturist before treatment.”

Treatment of knee pain with acupuncture commonly involves using acupuncture with electro-stimulation at the injury sites, to reduce pain, muscle tension, swelling, and inflammation, increase soft tissue mobility and joint range-of-motion, and normalise local blood flow and lymphatic drainage.

“Proloferative acupuncture” joint stabilisation therapy can help to rehabilitate knee ligaments that have been strained or over-stretched, and to stimulate tissue repair in degenerated or strained meniscii.

Acupuncture appears to be effective in relieving pain and improving function for osteoarthritis in the knee; among the conditions for which the most research has been performed regarding acupuncture efficacy, Ben says.

For example, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Health Care, a landmark study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* and funded in part by NCCAM and the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, was conducted across three sites and is the longest and largest clinical trial of acupuncture to date.

It involved 570 patients with osteoarthritis of the knee, aged 50 and older, who received one of three treatments: acupuncture, simulated acupuncture (placebo), or a control group following the Arthritis Foundation's self-help course for managing their condition over 12 weeks. All participants continued to receive standard medical care from their primary physicians, including anti-inflammatory medications and pain relievers.

By week 8, participants receiving acupuncture showed a significant increase in function and by week 14 a significant decrease in pain, compared with the other groups. These results sustained through week 26.

Overall, participants in the acupuncture group had a 40 per cent drop in pain and a nearly 40 per cent improvement in function compared to their assessments at the start of the study.

“The relative safety of acupuncture for knee pain makes it worth trying in almost all cases,” says Ben.

For more information on acupuncture to treat knee pain, contact Ben Lian at Meridian Acupuncture Health Centre, 156 Waipuna Rd East, Mt Wellington. Phone 09 527-0383 or 021 188-5566, or email [meridian-health156@gmail.com](mailto:meridian-health156@gmail.com) or visit <https://www.meridianacupuncture.co.nz/>