

Acupuncture For Non-Surgical Treatment Of The Cervical Herniated Disc

People in pain from a cervical herniated disc will frequently inquire about acupuncture. To find out more about this, I met with Gary Sapolin who is an experienced acupuncturist here in New York.

Que 1: Patients love acupuncture. So can you tell us what it is like when the patient first comes to you with a cervical herniated disc. Is there an evaluation or what is the first visit like?

Ans: Ok, well, the first visit usually we do not know the history yet of the patient, so the first thing we do is have them fill out a health questionnaire, a little simpler than they will usually see in a medical office, describing their history. I will talk to them and ask them questions about the nature of their pain. If it is for cervical herniated disc, I want to make sure that is really what I am treating, so I will ask him if they have seen a medical doctor, if they have had any evaluations, MRI, or what not, and then we will proceed with a little bit of an examination just seeing where the weakness is. History-wise, if there is tingling or numbness in the arm, but in the first visit, after a little bit of evaluation, we will go ahead with the treatment. The beauty of acupuncture is the worst case scenario is was it will not work, but it cannot do any harm, so even if someone does not have a herniated disc and they think they do and we are treating that, it can only help the neck pain

Que 2: So even on the first visit, they can expect to have needles put in?

Ans: Yes.

Que 3: So what does acupuncture do for the cervical herniated disc? How does it work?

Ans: Well, it works in a few ways. The Chinese over 1000 of years have figured out that there are various points in the body that they call acupuncture points that are _____ or meridians, which are pathways of energy flow in the body. They have identified these points as places where you can access the body's energy and by stimulating these points get a reaction that is beneficial to the human body. There is a lot of question about how it actually works, especially in biomedical terms, but the bottom line is that it does something to stimulate blood flow that they have shown that acupuncture is a vasodilator, so it promotes blood flow. They think most likely the way that it works with treating pain and inflammation is it causes the release of endorphins locally, so there are a couple of other ideas of how it works, but what we know just

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empirically is that it helps reduce pain, swelling, inflammation, so it promotes an environment that allows for healing wherever the problem is.

The bottom line of acupuncture is if you are not afraid of needles, it is terrific. It is very safe and it will help with some of the pain. Now, some of the problems with acupuncture I see are that it is not going to solve the problem of the herniated disc, and also from my experience, it is sort of temporary. People do go to acupuncture. They feel better for a while, but again, the pain in the arm and the neck will come back, but if you have a good acupuncturist and you are willing to spend the money on it, and you are in pain, I think it is something worth doing. Let us say you have this much pain, and then you have the acupuncture and it brings the pain down to here, that is this much pain you have just gotten rid of without medication in a safe manner, and this may make the difference between you being miserable at night and being comfortable. So bottom line of acupuncture is "I love it, it is worth a try, and I think it may help reduce some of the pain that you are suffering with."

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