**HOW, AND WHY, THE MEDIA TRICKS YOU**

**Study: Acupuncture Eases Low Back Pain**

**Patients Report More Pain Relief From Acupuncture Than Conventional Treatment**

By [Salynn Boyles](http://www.webmd.com/susan-boyles)  
WebMD Health News

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](http://www.webmd.com/louise-chang)

Sept. 24, 2007 -- Acupuncture proved to be more effective than conventional lower back pain treatments in a new study, but it was no more effective than a sham needle procedure.

The German study compared outcomes among 1,162 patients with chronic low back pain treated with traditional Chinese acupuncture; sham acupuncture; or a conventional approach to treating back pain using drugs, physical therapy, and exercise.

The study is the largest investigation of acupuncture vs. conventional nonsurgical treatment for lower back pain ever reported, researchers say.

"Acupuncture represents a highly promising and effective treatment option for chronic back pain," researcher Heinz Endres, MD, tells WebMD. "Patients experienced not only reduced pain intensity, but also reported improvements in the disability that often results from back pain -- and therefore in their quality of life."

**Acupuncture for Back Pain**

Endres says up to 85% of people will suffer from low back pain at some point in their lives. The pain may last for a few days or continue as chronic low back pain for months and years.

While a recent review of research showed acupuncture to be useful for the treatment of low back pain when given in addition to other therapies, the latest study was designed to determine if acupuncture is an effective treatment on its own.

Acupuncture was delivered in 10, 30-minute sessions conducted over six weeks. Patients who received conventional treatments had a similar number of total treatments, which included exercise, pain medication, and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

The acupuncture groups were allowed to use medication for acute episodes of back pain only. This consisted of NSAID use no more than two days a week during the treatment period.

Traditional acupuncture involved inserting needles at fixed points and depths on the body and manipulating the needles in accordance with ancient Chinese practice.

With the sham treatment, needles were inserted in the lower back at shallower depths at non-acupuncture points and the needles were not manipulated.

Patients who got the traditional and sham acupuncture treatments were almost twice as likely to report treatment-related responses six months later as patients who did not have acupuncture.

**Sham Acupuncture Works**

Several earlier studies involving patients with chronic pain have shown similar benefits for traditional and sham acupuncture.

A 2005 analysis of 33 back pain studies did show a treatment advantage for traditional acupuncture, but a researcher involved in the analysis says more recent studies challenge this finding.

"The evidence as a whole suggests that the benefits of true acupuncture over sham acupuncture are almost clinically irrelevant," Eric Manheimer, MS, of the University of Maryland Center for Integrative Medicine tells WebMD. "The reasons for this are not really clear. It may be that putting the needles anywhere stimulates some sort of analgesic effect."

Acupuncture is still considered an alternative treatment for low back pain in the U.S., but this is no longer the case in Germany. Based on findings from the newly reported study, it is now covered by state health insurance.

Endres says acupuncture is a clearly useful treatment for low back pain, even if we don't understand why.

"Just because we cannot explain exactly the mechanism by which a treatment works, doesn't mean that it doesn't work," he says.

**I was sitting in a boring computer class last fall and surfing the internet for news when I saw this story. Fortunately I was reading an honest news source, KFWB, who told the whole story.**

**But when I got home and put on the TV, I was disappointed by the news coverage of this study which only reported the defeat of western medicine by acupuncture. On two different stations they purposely left out the most significant part of the story - that sham acupuncture gave exactly the same results as real acupuncture. The most likely explanation for the superiority of acupuncture (sham or real) is the placebo effect which has been well-documented by scientific studies.**

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**But TV news stations compete viciously with each other for survival (ratings). It is very sad to see our journalism (one of the proud foundations of our country) become the sad institution that it is today. Truth is secondary (but don’t get caught in an outright lie). Entertainment is all that matters and getting butts on the couch. That is why the media (whether video, print, or other) sensationalizes anything out of the ordinary. Alternative medicine, pseudoscience, car chases, and slices of toast with an image of the Virgin Mary are what keeps people glued to their sets. Also anything to do with celebrities, politics, religion, and especially race are sure bets.**

**And while we’re talking about the Virgin Mary stories, I have a question: how do they know what she looks like? As far as I know, no one has any idea what she looks like. So how do these people know that their pizza slice looks like the virgin mary? The media are supposed to be trained in investigative reporting. Some of them certainly must have had questions cross their mind. But you notice that they never come out and ask the person any question that would challenge their credibility. Religion, like race, are taboo subjects in our politically correct society and are granted special status. The entire event is always treated with utmost respect and credulity. They may laugh because it appeared on a slice of pizza but they don’t laugh at the idea. Why do you think the media never asks? Why do you think they never question the person about anything other than the most innocuos details, like where it was found.**

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**Another case of “journalistic integrity” (that phrase is fast becoming an oxymoron) happened in Florida where a teacher was supposedly fired for “wizardry” for making a match disappear in front of his class.**

**This story served its purpose as it went nationwide. Had they done any investigation (as was done after the fact) they would have discovered the real reasons for the teacher’s dismissal. But those reasons were rather boring and wouldn’t have even made the local news.**

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**One of the most popular ways to get news in today’s world is through the television talk show. And one of the biggest players in that field is Oprah Winfrey.**

**I admit that I didn’t watch her show. What little I knew of her was that she seemed very gullible to ‘New Age’ ideas. Then I saw a video of her on YouTube where she had a guest on who was discussing spiritualism. Oprah is a strong believer in everyone being able to find their own spirituality and in being very tolerant of other people’s beliefs. The video then showed her being harrassed by a female fundamentalist Christian who started quoting scripture. Oprah tried to defuse the woman politely but the woman was determined to preach her sermon. Finally Oprah told her that she was not going to argue religion with her.**

**I have to admit, I now have a great deal of respect for Oprah Winfrey. Even though her and I do not agree on spirituality, we both agree on each other’s right to believe what we want. Her spiritualism (whatever that may entail) is certainly a huge step forward from fundamentalist Christianity (which is very similar in attitude to fundamentalist Islam). I want to clarify that many Muslims and Christians are NOT fundamentalists. They tend to be more like Oprah - tolerant of others with no desire to go hurt or kill people with whom they disagree; and they don’t try to force their beliefs onto others.**

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**Dr. Phil is another popular talk show host. He was interviewing a father who wanted his child back from foster parents. Dr. Phil had an ‘expert’ in the front row whose job it is to support everything that Dr. Phil says. So this expert chimed in that, this man may have been the biological father but the foster parent is the one who raised the child and gave him love and took care of him: that is what it means to be a ‘father’.**

**Now I get the expert’s point, but you can’t redefine words to make them mean what you need them to mean. This man was the father in the real sense of the word regardless of how clever this expert can be at playing wordgames.**

**But then Dr. Phil surprised me on a show several weeks later. He had on a famous guest named James Van Praagh. Van Praagh communicates with the dead. I read where one skeptic scolded Dr. Phil for selling out by allowing Van Praagh on his show. I had a different take. I understand that he needs to compete and provide entertainment. I watched the show to see how he handled this guest and to my surprise Dr. Phil made it clear that he was skeptical. It’s true that he went along with Van Praagh and didn’t really challenge him, but then, I didn’t really expect him to. The fact that he stated up front how he felt was good enough for me. I don’t consider that selling out, although it would be great if people like Van Praagh were in jail where they belong instead of earning obscene sums of money on national TV shows.**

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**Speaking of Van Praagh, a few days later he appeared on a morning television NEWS show. Now when people watch Oprah or Dr. Phil they understand (or should) that these are entertainment shows. But when people tune in to news shows that lends a certain credibility to the guest and their views.**

**The format of the show was three newswomen interviewing Van Praagh who did his usual bit about seeing their dead mothers standing right behind them. After a few minutes of this sham, he had the one in the middle in tears. All three seemed to be totally gullible to this con artist. The point here is that people take this a lot more seriously than simple entertainment TV. This is just pure sensationalistic journalism designed to attract viewers and the truth be damned.**

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**Jenny McCarthy & Jim Carrey appeared on good morning america and made a bunch of erroneous claims about vaccines: that they contain anti-freeze, ether, and hydrochloric acid that will destroy tissue on direct contact.**

**There is no anti-freeze in any vaccine nor any ether. Vaccines are ph-neutral: it wouldn’t matter what acids were in the vaccine, if the vaccine is ph-neutral it is neither acidic nor alkaline.**

**When you have no facts, do what irrationals always do - appeal to emotion. Why does the media not present the truth? By now it should be clear: it’s all about ratings not truth.**

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**UFO’S AND THE MEDIA**

**Here’s the headline I pulled off the internet recently.**

**SECRET UFO FILES RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC!**

**The men were air traffic controllers.**

**Experienced, calm professionals.**

**Nobody was drinking.**

**But they were so worried about losing their jobs**

**that they demanded their names be kept off the official report.**

**Obviously all those statements are designed to give credibility to the report:**

**1 Air traffic controllers = very responsible, honest, intelligent people.**

**2 Experienced, calm professionals = not impressionable rookies, not easily**

**excitable, and trained professionals - not amateurs.**

**3 No altered states of consciousness here - never.**

**4 Finally, throw in the old argument about the ‘evil, vengeful government’**

**that threatens all of them. This ropes in the conspiracy theorists.**

**According to Nick Pope, a UFO expert who helped the Ministry of Defense investigate the phenomenon, the most common reasons for UFO sightings are: aircraft lights, bright stars and planets, satellites, meteors, airships, and things like that.**

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**GREAT SKEPTICAL QUOTES**

**Austin Dacey**

**He is a philosopher who earned his doctorate in 2002. He serves as a respresentative to the United Nations for the** [**Center for Inquiry,**](http://www.centerforinquiry.net) **a think tank concerned with the secular, scientific outlook. He is also on the editorial staff of** [**Skeptical Inquirer**](http://www.csicop.org/si/) **and** [**Free Inquiry**](http://secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=fi&page=index) **magazines. His writings have appeared in numerous publications including the New York Times, USA Today, and Science.**

**"Secular values can turn a civilization inside out.**

**In post-Christian Europe, entire nations have been plunged into**

**endemic health, skyrocketing education and hopelessly low rates of violent crime."**

**Ayn Rand**

**1905-1982**

**A** [**Russian**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russia)**-born** [**American**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States)[**novelist**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novelist)**,** [**philosopher**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosopher)**,** [**playwright**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playwright)**, and** [**screenwriter**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Screenwriter)**. She is widely known for her best-selling novels** [**The Fountainhead**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fountainhead) **and** [**Atlas Shrugged**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlas_Shrugged)**, and for developing a philosophical system she called** [**Objectivism**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectivism_%28Ayn_Rand%29)**.**

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**"Judge, and be prepared to be judged."**

**Let’s compare that to the bible.**

**The bible says “Judge not, least ye be judged” (or words to that effect).**

**The bible tells you not to judge others because doing so will likely result later in you being judged. We could argue all day long over the nuances and meanings of the word “judge”. I am not going to do that. I am just going to assume the meaning that most of us would, when we use the word “judge”. It is generally used to mean “analyze”. The act of “judging” is the act of “analyzing.”**

**In our society it has become politically correct to say “don’t be judgemental.” Are they saying “don’t be analitcal?” No. What they are really saying is “do not criticize.” No one is ever going to complain because you give them too many compliments. They mean “do not criticize me.”**

**Religion has never tolerated criticism; science on the other hand, invites it. The punishment for challenging religion is well known to all of us. In the 21st century the criticism of religion has become bolder and more common as religion has had to back away from its practices in the past that it used to control dissent such as crusades, inquisitions, witch-burnings, etc. But, make no mistake, dissent is not encouraged. If you try to dissent in the Muslim world, I think we have all heard about what happens there: heresy and blasphemy are still on the books and the penalty (death) is still enforced. And as the Dutch cartoonist learned, it is enforced against foreigners who don’t even live in their countries.**

**In the world we live in today, religion is finally being exposed to the same criticism as science and all other human activities. People do judge. They analyze and if they feel it’s warranted, they criticize. That is called thinking and expressing yourself. Ayn Rand hit the nail right on the head with her quote: “Judge and be prepared to be judged.” Everyone judges, it’s called thinking. Everyone criticizes when they feel justified, it’s called freedom of expression. And, everyone judges their judger, as is their right.**