



ANTI AGING / HEALTHY AGING

## The Science Behind the Efficacy of Cosmetic Acupuncture

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The beauty industry continues to boom and grow constantly, from topical creams, lotions and potions all the way to cutting edge cosmetic surgeries. Some treatments simply fail at being effective, while others may be effective but very costly and invasive; and finding a more natural treatment that is actually effective can be a difficult task. Cosmetic acupuncture is a multi-faceted treatment, aimed at treating the entire person in a holistic approach.

Aging should be considered a chronic, whole body process, so when we are looking at how to slow down that process it is critical to look at the entire picture. Utilizing only a cream or serum will have limited effect if the person continues to smoke cigarettes, be perpetually dehydrated, or in a constant state of elevated stress.

Our lifestyle in and of itself, has a dramatic effect on how we look, so it should be no surprise that much of the benefit of cosmetic acupuncture lies in its' holistic approach. When we approach skin care and anti-aging skin care in particular, there are a few goals we need to keep in mind, and a treatment that adheres to these goals helps us administer effective skin care that produces desired results, while also avoiding injury to the skin structure so that the effects can last without repercussions later on.

### HOLISTIC BALANCE

First and foremost, we want to balance cell function in the body and skin. This goal is often neglected in topical or medical beauty treatments because those treatments are only focusing on the skin and not the entire person. Acupuncture treatments for any condition help to stimulate this process of balance and being.

Physiologically the body is lowering oxidative stress, decreasing stress hormones, increasing cell longevity and ATP synthesis, and triggering dopamine release.<sup>1</sup> Acupuncture helps to supply skin

cells with the essential building blocks they require by improving digestion and regulating stress, this enhances the nutrition we receive from our food and also increases blood flow and lymphatic drainage to the face. The function of the full body acupuncture treatment can be considered anti-aging in and of itself due to its profound effects on regulating the body's response to stress.



### FIBROBLASTS ARE KEY

Needling into the face also produces an incredible effect on the body and the skin itself. We can consider the process of needling the skin wounding the body, and our body's immune response to such a wound can produce an anti-aging effect when done precisely and correctly. A wound in the body - like that from an acupuncture needle - stimulates the division of fibroblasts - fibroblasts are responsible for making collagen, elastin and glycosaminoglycans (GAGs), which all cause ideal features in the skin - firmness, tightness, and plumpness, secondary to good hydration.

In the medical beauty world this process is usually stimulated by ablative therapies like IPL, chemical peels, fraxel laser etc. The problem here is that these treatments can also cause thinning of the epidermis plus loss of dermal papillae due to their overly invasive nature.<sup>2</sup> Acupuncture needles are minimally intrusive to the skin, directly targeting the areas we want to see improvement in with intradermal needle threading in wrinkles. By stimulating the immune response through needling, we help to signal the cell what to do by releasing growth factors and stimulating fibroblast division. Through intradermal needling we can direct exactly where we want the body to send collagen, elastin and GAGs, thus producing an effect that helps to minimize fine lines and wrinkles.

### PRESERVING INTEGRITY

Great skin care aims to preserve the integrity of the epidermis. Acupuncture, microcurrent and LED therapy are all minimally invasive treatments that maintain the integrity of the skin while simultaneously treating it. There is no downtime or peeling that occurs with the treatment, thus

allowing the skin to remain fully intact and functional, offering the most benefit from the treatment without having to undergo a recovery period.

By preserving the integrity of the skin, we also preserve the dermal papillae, this layer is important in supplying the exchange of oxygen, nutrients and waste products between the epidermis and dermis, and is also responsible for providing strength between the layers. When this layer is compromised, a separation between these layers occurs and this is how wrinkles are formed.<sup>2</sup> Acupuncture needles produce minimal damage, the most common undesired side effect is bruising at needle sites, and the skin remains intact and strong, enhanced by the treatment as opposed to weakened by it.

## MUSCLE TRAINING

While all of the effects of a cosmetic acupuncture treatment produce wonderful results in a safe way for the skin itself, we cannot forget about the importance of the muscles of the face. The musculature of the face is complex, consisting of 57 muscles which lose their tone and mass as we age. We also often wind up *training* the muscles of our face to contract in a certain way which results in an undesirable breakdown of the dermal papillae between the dermis and epidermis - the classic '11' lines between the eyebrows are a great example of this. Cosmetic acupuncture treatments aim to address these issues of the muscles - triggering some muscles to re-engage, bringing tone back into the muscle resulting in a lifted appearance, and triggering other muscles to disengage - relaxing these muscles helps resolve and soften wrinkles.

## The Takeaway

These four key components to healthy, effective anti-aging skin care are what make cosmetic acupuncture such an all-around successful treatment. Treating skin care holistically is of utmost importance, because the health of our skin is dependent upon the health of our entire body. Ignoring any one of these treatment strategies results in a less than desirable treatment, perhaps producing results, but with severe side effects and damage to the skin, or not producing results that are satisfactory to our patients.

## References

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2. Setterfield L. *The concise guide to dermal needling, Expanded Medical Edition*. B.C., Canada: Acacia Dermacare Inc., 2013.

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