



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Dosing Our Medicine: How Many Treatments?

ARE YOU ESSENTIALLY LETTING YOUR PATIENT DECIDE? IT'S TIME TO TAKE CHARGE.

A patient walks into your office with years of IBS and headaches. They want to feel better. You do your full questioning, make a diagnosis and give them an amazing acupuncture treatment. *And then what do you do?*

Do you ask them when they want to come back? I hope not! Why? Because *you should be telling them exactly when they need to come back, not vice versa*. If you're letting your patients do whatever they wish in terms of your care, then you are doing them a huge disservice - because *they* are not the expert, *you* are. It's your responsibility to advise your patients in their best interest as an expert.

### What Patients Want: Your Expert Recommendation

One of the amazing things about our medicine is how thorough our intake questioning is. A thorough intake makes you extremely qualified to make a personalized expert recommendation for your patients. And that's exactly what they want from you - a personalized recommendation from an expert.



We think people don't want to be told what to do, but they do. That's why they came to you - not to be stuck by needles, but to have their health issue transformed.

You must make a recommendation as to when your patient needs to come back, how frequently they should be getting treatments, and give them an estimate of how many treatments they should expect it to take. This is practicing good medicine. It's just as much your job as inserting needles.

If you're *not* doing this, it would be like a doctor giving their patient antibiotics and not telling them how many to take or when to take them; or a doctor not telling their patient how long to keep the cast on for their broken bone to heal. It's reckless and not in the best interest of the patient.

How many acupuncture treatments will it take?

It can be difficult for acupuncturists to estimate the number of treatments it will take. (I feel this should be discussed more during our education.) It would be impossible to predict *exactly the moment* when your patient will experience significant improvement in their symptoms. The good news is that you don't need to predict it precisely; but you do need to give an estimation.

I teach and coach acupuncturists; these are the guidelines I give them for estimating how many treatments it will take:

- How long have the symptoms been going on? The longer, the more treatments it will take.
- How old is the patient? The older, the more treatments it will take.
- Are symptoms consistent? If symptoms, say pain for example, are consistently a 4 out of 10 in terms of pain, the more treatments it will take. If they are variable, say sometimes a 2/10 and sometimes 8/10, it will take fewer treatments.
- How is the patient progressing? You can continue to tweak your estimation as you work with the patient, and update your expectations and recommendations based on what you see.

There is a beginning, middle and end to a course of treatment. The beginning is how many treatments it takes for them to start seeing improvement. The middle is where you make most of the progress. And the end is making it stick. If the beginning stage takes longer, you know the middle stage will take longer, too. You can adjust expectations based on the progress you see.

My simple rule of thumb: When in doubt, I recommend telling your patients that it should take around eight treatments.

### What Your Colleagues Say

I thought it might be helpful to see what other acupuncturists experience with treatment numbers and outcomes. So, I created a Google Survey and asked acupuncturists what their experiences have been – how many treatments it usually takes to see significant improvement for various symptoms. I received more than 180 responses. Here's what some of the data shows:

- Average treatment time for acute back pain: 3-4 treatments
- Average treatment time for chronic back pain: 8-10 treatments
- Average treatment time for IBS / digestive symptoms: 6-8 treatments
- Average treatment time for migraine headaches: 8-10 treatments
- Average treatment time for insomnia: 8-10 treatments
- The overall average treatment time was eight treatments. If you'd like to take the survey, go to: <http://bit.ly/2JE6p0z>. If you'd like to see more of the results, visit [www.acuprosper.com/acupuncture-dosage](http://www.acuprosper.com/acupuncture-dosage).

### Other Considerations

I know there are a lot of variables we should take into account. Did the patient do herbs? How frequently were they coming in? What is their lifestyle like? If a doctorate student would like to pick up this research, that would be fantastic. I think this information is incredibly helpful for acupuncturists, and worth the time to research it properly.

### Don't Doubt The Medicine

The reason I want to share the results of this survey is not to compare or make people feel pressure to get results within a certain number of treatments. On the contrary, it's because I want to take some pressure off. I want more acupuncturists to be patient and give themselves and our medicine adequate time.

I've found that too many acupuncturists are underestimating our medicine, saying things like, "Let's give it three treatments and see how you do" (or worse, not making a dosage or frequency recommendation at all). If their patient hasn't seen improvement in three treatments, they think acupuncture isn't working for that patient. Then that patient leaves thinking acupuncture didn't work for them, when they very likely could have been helped with just a few more treatments.

As a result, that acupuncturist might doubt the medicine and doubt themselves as a practitioner. It's tragic because our medicine is powerful and amazing, and I'd wager the practitioner was doing everything right except for one thing – having confidence in their medicine, and advising and leading patients in their best interest.

So please, it's your responsibility to do this. You must make a recommendation as to when your patient needs to come back, how frequently they should be getting treatments, and give them an estimate of how many treatments they should expect it to take. *It's irresponsible not to do this.*

Your patients come to you because they want a result. Your duty is to confidently and

compassionately insist, guide and lead them to receive the number and frequency of treatments that are going to help them get the most benefits. When in doubt, recommend eight treatments, not one, two or three.

This is one of the keys to your patients' success, as well as your success in practice. You won't get those word-of-mouth referrals if people aren't sticking around long enough to experience the results of your care. So, this is just a friendly reminder to have confidence in our amazing medicine, have confidence in yourself, and please dose your medicine adequately.

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