

Your Next Step in Patient Care and Practice Growth: Laser Acupuncture

Rob Berman | DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE

Acupuncture Today has featured articles discussing laser acupuncture going back over a decade. Lasers have evolved over time to include many more options such as specialized handpieces, power levels (peak and average) and wavelengths. Visible colors like red, green, violet and blue are utilized, along with near-infrared wavelengths. See figure 1.

Traditional acupuncture involves needles. That methodology is tried and true, but limits the number of potential patients you can serve. What is your protocol for patients who are either afraid of needles or for whom needling is contraindicated? Will these potential patients seek out other practitioners who offer methods like lasers in their practices?

The survey says...

A few years ago, *AT* commissioned a study titled "The Expanding Acupuncture Practice." The study revealed that 18 percent of responding practitioners currently utilized lasers in their practice. Meanwhile, 17 percent were "thinking about using" and an additional 20 percent said they "would like to use someday."

What is holding back acupuncturists from more fully incorporating lasers into their practices? Perhaps it is a lack of information and comfort with lasers and their evolution over the past 10-plus years.

One of the major goals of acupuncture is to move *qi* and blood throughout the body. There are multiple ways to achieve that goal. Laser therapy is one option performed for decades in Europe and Asia that could be employed to better expand your care options for your patients.

What is a laser and How Does It Work?

A laser is a source of an intense, coherent, directional beam of optical radiation. It is an acronym for: Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. A laser usually is composed of an energy source, a resonant cavity and an active lasing medium.¹

A laser works by increasing ATP synthesis in the mitochondria, activating the electron transport system, and many other biochemical and biophysical reactions in the tissue. The photons, which are the packets of light energy produced by the laser, penetrate through the skin and directly into the cells. The cells are then able to absorb and convert this light energy to chemical energy to promote healing and thus, pain relief.²

What Are The Beneficial Effects?

Laser therapy has numerous beneficial effects for relieving pain, resolving inflammation and increasing the speed, quality and tensile strength of tissue repair. It has also been shown to stimulate the immune system, resolve infection and improve the function of damaged neurological tissue. Laser therapy is also effective in increasing collagen production, bone repair, reducing edema, increasing lymphatic drainage, and increasing production of capillary beds.³ Biological effects include:⁴

- Anti-inflammation
- Analgesic
- Accelerated tissue repair and cell growth
- Immunoregulation
- Improved nerve function
- Improved vascular activity
- Increased metabolic activity
- Reduced fibrous tissue formation

What Conditions Can Laser Treat?

Laser can be utilized from head (headache, TMD) to toe (gout, fracture). Lasers have a limited number of contraindications including:⁵

- Eye exposure
- Over gravid uterus
- Over cancer or tumor
- Over thyroid
- Through clothing

Treatment Approaches

A handheld, portable laser or a higher-power laser with a coned-down beam or special handpiece can be utilized to treat the acupuncture points. Apply your knowledge of acupuncture theory and practice with needling to working with lasers. There are two theories on how to treat acupuncture points.

Precise: Place and hold the laser exactly on the acupuncture point until the required number of joules in the dose is applied. Within the "precise" category is auricular acupuncture with laser.⁶

General: Treat the acupuncture point and the surrounding areas by sweeping the laser to cover the area.

Wrapping Up

Let's wrap up by examining some of the advantages of utilizing lasers in your practice. According to Chon, et al.,⁷

- It is painless.
- It is relatively safe when used according to indications / contraindications.
- No needles, giving the practitioner another treatment option for the needle-phobic patient.
- Depending on the laser you are using, there may be a mild warming sensation patients may like.
- No risk of infection since you are not breaking the skin.
- Easier to treat areas that are difficult or uncomfortable to needle.
- You employ the same diagnostic skills in locating the acupuncture points and meridians you

want to address. However, you are treating acupuncture points in less than 60 seconds compared to 20 minutes or longer for needles.

References

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AUGUST 2021