



ACUPUNCTURE & ACUPRESSURE

## Helping Veterans With PTSD

NEW STUDY SUGGESTS ACUPUNCTURE CAN HELP COMBAT-RELATED POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Editorial Staff

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- A new study adds to the evidence suggesting acupuncture can positively influence PTSD psychobiology and symptomatology.
- Veterans ages 18-55 were assigned to receive acupuncture or sham for 15 weeks (one-hour sessions, twice weekly, up to 24 total sessions).
- Analysis showed a significant reduction in fear-potentiated startle (i.e., fear extinction) in the acupuncture group, but not the sham group.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a unfortunate reality among veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces; in any given year, 11-20% of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and 12% of Gulf War veterans experience PTSD; while the lifetime prevalence of PTSD is as high as 30% among veterans of The Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup>

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder are dire: “The symptoms and effects of posttraumatic stress disorder, commonly known as PTSD, can disrupt your everyday life. People with PTSD sometimes withdraw from their family members and friends. They can find it hard to concentrate, startle easily, and lose interest in things they used to care about. Some may try to dull their feelings by misusing alcohol or drugs.”<sup>2</sup>

A new study<sup>3</sup> adds to the evidence suggesting acupuncture can positively influence PTSD psychobiology and symptomatology. The two-arm, parallel-group, prospective, blinded, randomized clinical trial compared traditional (verum) acupuncture to sham acupuncture, with veterans ages 18-55 assigned to receive acupuncture or sham (the control) for 15 weeks (one-hour sessions, twice weekly, up to 24 total sessions).

Per the study, “The primary outcome was pretreatment to posttreatment change in PTSD symptom severity on the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale-5 (CAPS-5). The secondary outcome was pretreatment to posttreatment change in fear-conditioned extinction, assessed by fear-potentiated startle response. Outcomes were assessed at pretreatment, midtreatment, and posttreatment.”

Analysis showed a significant reduction in fear-potentiated startle (i.e., fear extinction) in the acupuncture group, but not the sham group; and “a significant correlation ... between symptom reduction and fear extinction,” leading the study authors to conclude: “The acupuncture intervention used in this study was clinically efficacious and favorably affected the psychobiology of PTSD in combat veterans.”

### *References*

1. Howley EK. “Statistics on PTSD in Veterans.” *U.S. News World Rep*, June 28, 2019.
2. PTSD. U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs.
3. Hollifield M, et al. Acupuncture for combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder: a randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Psychiatry*, Feb. 21, 2024.

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