

An Alternative Cure for Pain: Biopuncture

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The National Center for Health Statistics reports that approximately 4 in 10, or 75 million, Americans live with chronic pain (back pain, arthritis, joint pain, tendonitis, shoulder pain, nerve pain, overuse injuries etc). To put this into perspective, pain afflicts more people than diabetes, heart disease/stroke and cancer combined according to American Academy of Pain Medicine. Among other factors, we know that pain is more common in women, with increasing age, and also after traumatic injuries. Arguably, chronic pain needs to be on every physician’s short list of the top health issues facing patients.

Further research tells us that pain is one of the top 3 reasons for a patient to visit their doctor. What is wrong with this picture? What are we missing? The lack of effectiveness, as well as numerous, often serious, side effects of conventional treatments for chronic pain (e.g. medications, cortisone shots or surgery) are primary reasons that 40 million Americans look for a **complementary alternative medicine** (CAM) practitioner to help them find relief from pain. Common CAM therapies include: massage, manipulation, acupuncture, reiki, herbal medicines, vitamins, supplements, yoga, pilates, tai chi, qigong, etc.

New to such therapies is biopuncture, a recently introduced European injection therapy used to treat common pain and inflammatory problems. Although many injection-based therapies have been in existence for decades in Europe and the United States, the term biopuncture was coined by its founder, Belgian family practice physician Jan Kersschot, MD, in 1991. He introduced biopuncture to the United States in 2008.

Biopuncture is grounded in conventional diagnosis. Based on several decades of clinical experience and research, biopuncture is a safe, effective new tool to fight pain. It can be used alongside conventional treatments or when conventional or alternative treatments fall short. It is not a stand-alone treatment. Typically, in a sport, spine and pain practice, the best results occur when the patient can combine biopuncture with good nutrition, which improves their body’s ability to heal and lessen tissue inflammation. Exercise and physical therapy are important treatments used alongside biopuncture to give patients strength, endurance and better posture so the problem does not return.

How does biopuncture work?

Biopuncture is a therapy using mostly plant-based ultra-low dilution product formulas which are injected into specific body regions to relieve pain and inflammation. The majority of injections are micro-injections with a very small needle just under the skin or into the muscle. One of the benefits of directly injecting the area of pain appears to be a “turbo effect,” or a much faster healing response.

In conventional medicine, the drug you take suppresses your symptoms immediately. That is why you need to take high doses of chemical substances in order to suppress pain or inflammation. But as soon as the medication stops working, you have to take another pill to “kill the pain” again.

However, in biopuncture, small doses of products are injected in order to stimulate or “wake up” the natural healing processes. The healing effect comes from “inside” your body – not from the products themselves. It’s the reaction of your immune system, which will produce the proper reactions to regain natural healing.

What is injected?

The two most commonly injected products are ultra-low doses (ULDs or “micro-doses”) of mainly medicinal plant and mineral-based products and/or glucose. The plant and mineral derived formulas were introduced in Germany in the 1930s. Currently, more than 100 million injectable vials are used per year throughout Europe, and in the United States.

Glucose has been injected by primarily United States physicians for over 50 years for both its pain-relieving and inflammatory-regulating effect. Traumeel® is also thought to inhibit the release of pain- and inflammation-causing chemicals from nerves. Glucose stimulates the release of growth factors to repair tissue. Injections given just under the skin and into the muscle affect the peripheral nervous system, which is in charge of tissue repair and degeneration. The top neuroscience researchers are targeting the nerves in a pain region as the primary players responsible for directing the delicate balance between tissue repair and dysfunction.

How is biopuncture different from acupuncture?

Biopuncture does not follow acupuncture meridians; the skilled practitioner instead looks for local “pain points” and “origin points” in the affected region. A pain point is likely to be a tender superficial nerve, inflamed tissue or trigger point (muscle knot).

What are the most common micro-dose formulas used in the US?

The most common products used in sports medicine and pain practices are Traumeel®, Lymphomyosot®, Spascupreel® and Zeel®. Traumeel® is used to reduce pain and swelling. Lymphomyosot is used for lymphatic drainage. Zeel® is used for arthritis. Spascupreel® is used for muscle spasm. Each of these formulas contains a combination of botanical and mineral ingredients, i.e. Traumeel® has arnica montana to reduce swelling, comfrey to decrease joint pain, chamomile and St. John’s Wort to reduce pain, and calendula (marigold) and echinacea to stimulate the immune system. The product which is best researched and most widely used in oral, topical and injectable forms is Traumeel®. (Ed. note: The author has no financial relationship with Traumeel®; however, much of the published research focuses on this product.)

What conditions are typically treated with biopuncture?

The common factor is pain and inflammation, be that in a soft tissue or joint or in the lining of the respiratory or gastrointestinal tract. Each of these tissues has nerves that become chronically inflamed and cells that secrete chemicals that initiate and maintain pain and inflammation.

Musculoskeletal problems: sprains and strains, joint pain, tendonitis, plantar fasciitis, shoulder pain (rotator cuff syndrome, impingement), mild to moderate arthritis, back/neck pain, nerve pain, painful scars, residual pain after surgery

Medical problems: asthma, hay fever, irritable bowel, eczema, bronchitis, migraine headaches and irritable bowel syndrome

What kind of physician can practice biopuncture?

Make sure you work with an experienced doctor or skilled CAM (complementary alternative medicine) practitioner. The physician must be knowledgeable about biopuncture. They must have superior knowledge of anatomy and great skill with injections. Each case must be individualized.

It is also important to note that plant-based or herbal medications should only be given by a qualified physician or licensed professional. (Remember, just because a product uses the word “natural” does not necessarily make it safe and effective.) In a few states, the medical boards have granted injection privileges to non-MDs, such as licensed acupuncturists. Biopuncture is not covered by insurance at this time and prices vary by state and practitioner.

How safe and effective is biopuncture as compared to conventional treatments?

Common over the counter and prescription NSAIDs and steroid injections in fact may not help (particularly in the longterm) and may cause harm. The current best evidence for use of NSAIDs suggests it may be helpful in the short-term for 1-2 weeks, but longterm use is associated with increased risk of gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, kidney complications and death. Also, increasingly, animal research is showing that use of NSAIDs may interfere with the normal tissue repair process and ultimately weaken the tissue and increase the chances of a recurrent problem. In terms of safety and side effects, we know that steroids are sometimes necessary; however, a single knee injection can suppress the immune system for a month.

What can a patient expect if they choose to pursue biopuncture treatment?

Most people, unless they have a true needle phobia, are surprised by how well they tolerate the injections. Very small needles are used for the majority of injections. The number of injections per session depends on the nature and severity of your problem.

An elbow problem typically requires 5-10 specific injections. Common ankle sprains or acute injury heal within a few weeks, usually more quickly than if left without treatment. Chronic pain over many months or years may require several weeks or a few months of treatments. I tell most of my patients that they will have treatments up to about 2 months; usually by week 4, both the patient and I can see objective results. If a patient has significant medical illnesses, the course may be longer or ineffective. This treatment does require more patience than cortisone injections for instance because we are trying to heal the problem and not simply suppress the symptoms. Biopuncture is not meant to treat serious illnesses such as infections or cancer. Patients with severe depression, fibromyalgia, auto immune disease (lupus), multiple sclerosis or other major illness may not respond at all or may only be partial responders.

Symptomatic relief may take a while, especially when the problem has been there for months or years. However, when dealing with fresh injuries, these injections can give results very quickly.

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