

# A Pointed Treatment

**ACUPUNCTURE ISN'T JUST FOR TREATING PAIN. EVIDENCE SUGGESTS IT CAN ALSO HELP PEOPLE WITH DIABETES**

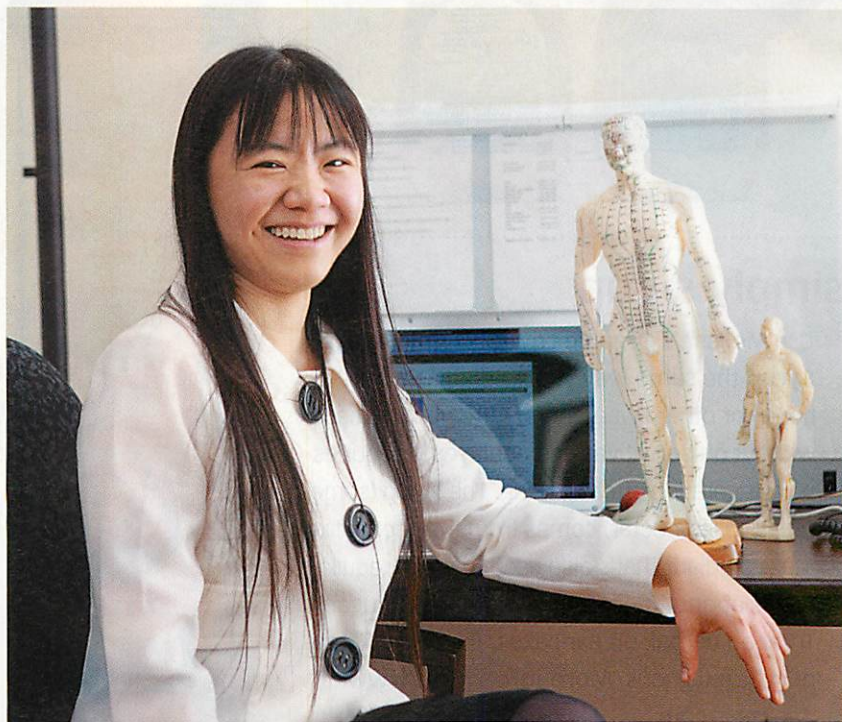
Acupuncture is a healing practice in which special hair-thin needles are placed into specific points on the skin and then manipulated. The goal is to correct disruptions of what traditional Chinese medicine calls *qi* (pronounced "chee"), the flow of energy inside the body.

According to the National Institutes of Health, "Ample clinical experience, supported by some research data, suggests that acupuncture may be a reasonable option for a number of clinical conditions." The NIH says acupuncture's risk of side effects is lower than the risk posed by many drugs and procedures, and recommends more research into acupuncture.

## Can acupuncture help diabetes?

The World Health Organization says non-insulin-dependent diabetes is one of several diseases "for which the therapeutic effect of acupuncture has been shown but for which further proof is needed."

Yi Song, PhD, a licensed acupuncturist in Boston, says acupuncture "can result in better control of blood sugar and can



Acupuncturist Yi Song says the treatment can help control blood sugar.

help with diabetes complications like high blood pressure, neuropathy, skin ulcers and vision problems." As a result, people with type 2 diabetes who experience these benefits may be able to use less medication or insulin, with their doctor's permission. "But this doesn't mean they should stop taking their medication, though in some cases, mild type 2s can go off of it," says Song.

There's no risk that acupuncture will cause hypoglycemia

(low blood glucose), she adds. "It restores function in the body so the body regulates itself."

In general, acupuncture is most effective for newer, milder cases of diabetes with fewer complications. Song's patients usually start with twice-weekly or weekly treatments, depending on their schedule and budget. (Some insurance plans cover acupuncture; many do not. It's best to check with your provider before beginning treatment.) After several visits, *they*



can come less often. Other acupuncturists say diabetes can take several months to treat.

### What about herbs?

Combining acupuncture with Chinese herbs may help patients achieve better and faster results, says Song. The combination helped one of her patients lower his fasting glucose from over 200 mg/dL to the 140s. Song favors custom blending her own herbal formulas versus dispensing manufactured herbal pills. An experienced herbalist should know how to sidestep any interactions between herbs and traditional medicines. **HM**

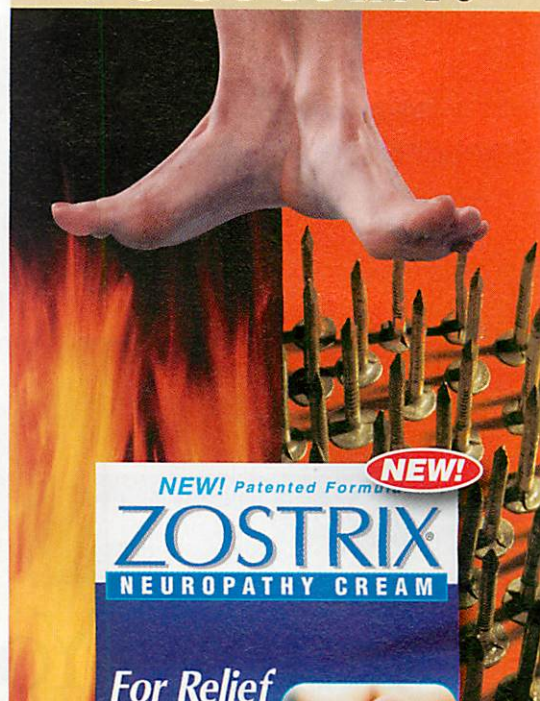


Yi Song performing acupuncture.

## ACUPUNCTURE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- > Be sure the acupuncturist is licensed or registered by your state.
- > Ask whether he or she uses sterile, single-use needles. (Most acupuncturists do.)
- > Make sure your acupuncturist doesn't needle any ulcers or infected areas. (Most acupuncturists don't.)
- > Tell your doctor you're seeing an acupuncturist, and vice versa. Also, tell your doctor if you are taking (or planning to take) herbal supplements.
- > If your glucose level goes down, consult your doctor about whether you might be able to change your medication levels.
- > Stick with your meal and exercise plan.
- > Ramp up on herbs gradually, over a few days, while continuing to monitor your blood glucose.
- > Take herbs and traditional medicines at least an hour apart, according to acupuncturist Li Song.
- > Avoid moxibustion, the burning of the mugwort herb on or near the skin. Some acupuncturists add moxibustion to their treatment, but they usually skip it when the patient has diabetes (with reduced pain sensation, they may not feel a skin burn).

# DIABETIC FOOT PAIN?



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