
SPECIAL ACUPUNCTURE LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE-US STUDY

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WASHINGTON, March 28 (Reuters) - A specialized acupuncture treatment that uses low levels of electrical stimulation can lower blood pressure dramatically in rats, U.S. researchers reported on Monday.

"This study suggests that acupuncture can be an excellent complement to other medical treatments, especially for those treating the cardiac system," said Dr. John Longhurst of the University of California, Irvine, who led the study.

"The Western world is waiting for a clear scientific basis for using acupuncture, and we hope that this research ultimately will lead to the integration of ancient healing practices into modern medical treatment."

Writing in the March issue of the *Journal of Applied Physiology*, Longhurst and colleagues said they inserted acupuncture needles at specific points on the front legs of rats with artificially elevated blood pressure rates.

This is equivalent to the inside of the forearms, slightly above the wrists in people.

Acupuncture alone had no effect on blood pressure in the rats, Longhurst's team found. But adding electrical stimulation at low frequencies lowered the blood pressure, although it did not bring it to normal.

The effects lasted for up to two hours.

"This type of electroacupuncture is only effective on elevated blood pressure levels, such as those present in hypertension, and the treatment has no impact on standing blood pressure rates," said Longhurst, a cardiologist.

"Our goal is to help establish a standard of acupuncture treatment that can benefit everyone who has hypertension and other cardiac ailments."

His team is now testing the technique on people.

High blood pressure is a major cause of heart disease, and can lead to heart failure, stroke, kidney failure and other conditions.