

# Want to Quit Smoking? Acupuncture Can Help You With Cravings

## Acupuncture, herbs, hypnotherapy curb cravings naturally

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If you are trying to quit smoking, acupuncture is a natural way to help you curb your craving for nicotine. Acupuncture, along with Chinese herbs and hypnotherapy, may not be as well-known as nicotine patches or gum. But they all can offer relief, especially in the acute phase of withdrawal when you're wrestling with fatigue, irritability and gnawing cravings.

Some people try acupuncture because they cannot tolerate the drugs used for tobacco cessation.. Unlike prescription medications, acupuncture has no side effects. In fact, it is very common to notice side benefits like improvements in sleep or mood. Others use acupuncture as part of an overall strategy to quit.

### Targeting the ears

As an acupuncturist, I target certain areas of the body for certain conditions. When it comes to helping smokers quit, [pressure points in the ears](#) are especially effective in suppressing cravings. The [National Acupuncture Detoxification Association](#) supports an entire protocol around this set of ear suppression points for addiction.

In between acupuncture treatments, patients at home can use 'ear seeds,' a form of acupressure. This involves placing tiny balls on the ear with adhesive tape in targeted areas. This technique allows patients to self-treat by applying pressure to points on the ear to help temper the urge to smoke.

There's a lot of theory behind the use of these pressure points. The cranial nerves, accessed through the ears, stimulate the nervous system to suppress the urge for cigarettes. We're trying not only to suppress cravings, but also to engage the relaxation response.

Studies show that acupuncture promotes the brain to pump out endorphins, our feel-good hormones. We're really manipulating the body using needles and targeted pressure to help support people as they work through withdrawal symptoms.

### Studies on acupuncture

In my own practice, I've seen a great many patients who used acupuncture successfully for tobacco cessation. Commonly, patients report fewer cravings, decreased irritability, improved mood, improved bowel movements and improved sleep.

However, literature to date has shown mixed results. Some [research](#) finds that acupuncture's use for all substance abuse is helpful when used along with conventional treatment to reduce cravings. But other studies, including [research](#) by the Cochrane Collaboration, has not found conclusive evidence of a significant effect.

### **Will it help me?**

The goal of [acupuncture](#) is to help curb any cravings you have for the nicotine itself. Generally, I tell patients to be tobacco-free for at least 24 hours before their first consult for acupuncture. If they take that step, this tells me they have the mindset to be tobacco-free. Many times, a patient's spouse has scheduled the appointment, or peer pressure spurs them to come in, and they're not really ready.

If a patient is not ready to throw away the cigarettes in their pocket, that tells me they're not mentally ready to quit.

Once patients are committed, I start seeing them two or three times per week in the beginning. Then the visits taper to once a week as withdrawal symptoms fade. Eventually, visits are discontinued altogether when they are tobacco-free.

### **Best when used with other methods**

Acupuncture is even more effective as part of a multidisciplinary approach that involves other aspects of integrative medicine. These may include:

- [Hypnotherapy](#), or attempts to train the subconscious mind to veer away from tobacco, (Acupuncture works to address the physical withdrawal symptoms.)
- [Chinese herbs](#), which are customized by an herbalist for each patient to decrease urges and to help with withdrawal symptoms. As a safety precaution, clinicians monitor patients' liver and kidney function closely to make sure the herbs are properly metabolized.

However you choose to find help, whether through a tobacco cessation program, acupuncture, herbs, hypnotherapy or a combination of methods, it's all worthwhile because quitting smoking is the single most healthy change you can make for your overall well-being.



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