

# Health Insights Today

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## CAM In Review

*Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) includes a wide range of healing practices. These are among recently published research articles in this developing field, from The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, the leading scholarly journal in the field.*

*When reading reports on new research, it is important to remember that no single study should be seen as providing the whole truth. The following reports offer helpful clues but in most cases further research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.*

### Acupuncture as Effective as Steroids for Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

Researchers in Taiwan compared acupuncture to steroid treatment in 77 patients with mild-to-moderate carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) as measured by objective changes in nerve conduction studies (NCS) and subjective symptoms assessment in a randomized, controlled study. Patients were randomly divided into 2 treatment arms: (1) 2 weeks of prednisolone 20 mg daily followed by 2 weeks of prednisolone 10 mg daily, and (2) acupuncture administered in 8 sessions over 4 weeks.

A validated standard questionnaire as a subjective measurement was used to rate the 5 major symptoms (pain, numbness, paresthesia, weakness/clumsiness, and nocturnal awakening) on a scale from 0 (no symptoms) to 10 (very severe). The total score in each of the 5 categories was termed the global symptom score (GSS). The evaluation of GSS showed that there was a high percentage of improvement in both groups at weeks 2 and 4, though statistical significance was not demonstrated between the 2 groups. Of the 5 main symptoms scores (pain, numbness, paresthesia, weakness/clumsiness, nocturnal awakening), only 1, nocturnal awakening, showed a significant decrease in acupuncture compared with the steroid group at week 4. Patients with acupuncture treatment had a significant decrease in distal motor latency compared with the steroid group at week 4. Acupuncture was well tolerated with minimal adverse effects.

Yang CP, Hsieh CL, Wang NH, et al. Acupuncture in patients with carpal tunnel syndrome: A randomized controlled trial. *Clin J Pain*. May 2009;25(4):327-333.

### Breathing Exercises Helpful for Hypertension

Breathing exercises from yoga and meditation practices may influence autonomic functions, possibly bringing therapeutic benefit to hypertensive patients. Researchers in India tested this hypothesis in a randomized, prospective, controlled clinical study using three groups. The subjects comprised 60 male and female patients aged 20-60 years with stage 1 essential hypertension. Patients were randomly and equally divided into the control and other two intervention groups, who were advised to do 3 months of slow-breathing and fast-breathing exercises, respectively. Baseline and postintervention recording of blood pressure (BP), autonomic function tests such as standing-to-lying ratio (S/L ratio), immediate heart rate response to standing (30:15 ratio), Valsalva ratio, heart rate variation with respiration (E/I ratio), hand-grip test, and cold pressor response were done in all subjects. Both slow-breathing and fast-breathing exercises had beneficial effects on blood pressure but slow breathing had a stronger effect than fast breathing. BP decreased longitudinally over a 3-month period with both interventions. S/L ratio, 30:15 ratio, E/I ratio, and BP response in the hand grip and cold pressor test showed significant change only in patients practicing the slow-breathing exercise.

Mourya M, Mahajan AS, Singh NP, Jain AK. Effect of Slow- and Fast-Breathing Exercises on Autonomic Functions in Patients with Essential Hypertension. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. 2009;15(7):711-717.