



Placebo and Pain: Chapter 12. Placebo Analgesia, Nocebo Hyperalgesia, and Acupuncture

By Jian Kong, Randy L. Gollub

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For thousands of years, both acupuncture and placebo (as a therapeutic ritual) have been used in healing. It is only recently that scientists have begun rigorously investigating the efficacy of acupuncture treatment. Recent meta analysis suggests that acupuncture treatment is only moderately more effective than sham treatment on some pain disorders such as osteoarthritis, headache, musculoskeletal and shoulder pain, which suggests that non-specific components are important contributors to the therapeutic benefits of acupuncture treatment. This chapter discusses the challenges involved in acupuncture research, specifically with regard to defining inert (sham) acupuncture treatment in a way that is consistent with ancient traditional acupuncture theory. It then introduces several studies that have been performed in an attempt to investigate the dissociation and interaction between sham and verum (real) acupuncture treatments, and concludes with questions that are essential for acupuncture researchers to address in the future to advance this field.

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