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### **Acupuncture for Athletes**

By: [Diane Joswick, L.Ac., MSOM](#)

All athletes and coaches are involved in a constant search for ways to improve performance and gain a competitive edge over their rivals. Many are finding that acupuncture can often provide that edge.

By following the principles of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), an acupuncture treatment can strengthen body function and restore internal harmony and balance. Professional sports teams and top athletes regularly have an acupuncturist on staff to treat injuries and to keep them performing at their peak.

Some of the best Olympic athletes are incorporating acupuncture into their wellness programs. China's most popular sportsman, the 7 foot 6 inch China basketball center, Yao Ming, used acupuncture and Oriental medicine to help him recover after undergoing surgery on his ankle in April, 2007.

Chinese swimmer, Wang Qun, was photographed doing some last minute training in Beijing with round marks on her back from an acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine treatment. The marks on the swimmers back were caused by cupping. Cupping is a technique in which a glass cup or bamboo jar is suctioned onto the body. It is used to relieve muscle pain, especially back pain from stiffness or injury; and to clear congestion in the chest, which can occur with common colds and influenza.



### **Studies on Acupuncture to Enhance Athletic Performance**

Studies have shown that acupuncture has measurable effects on the flow of blood to certain areas of the body, which could in turn boost athletic performance. One such study conducted at the *Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine* involved athletes running 5,000 meters, and then sitting for acupuncture treatments before they had a chance to catch their breath. The heart rates of the athletes who received the treatments recovered more quickly than those in the control group.

Another study published in the *American Journal of Acupuncture* measured the effects of acupuncture on anaerobic threshold and work capacity during exercise in healthy young males. Researchers found that individuals in the acupuncture treatment group had higher maximal exercise capacity and were able to perform higher workloads at the onset of blood lactate accumulation (OBLA) than individuals in the placebo group. The individuals that received acupuncture also had lower heart rates.

A recent study published in the January, 2008 issue of the *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine* examined the effects of acupuncture on cyclists. Twenty young (between 18 and 30 years of age) male cyclists underwent three tests per week, riding a stationary bike for 20 kilometers as fast as possible. The volunteers were divided into three groups that either received acupuncture, sham acupuncture or no acupuncture. Acupuncture points were chosen on the basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine and administered immediately before cycling. Sham acupuncture was shallow needling of known acupoints. Not only did the study show that the group that received acupuncture had a higher RPE scores compared to the other tests. The men receiving the real acupuncture treatments completed their cycling tests at a higher acceleration than the others.

## Acupuncture is well known for its effectiveness in reducing most types of pain, including sports-related injuries.

Acupuncture can be used to help decrease swelling, spasms and inflammation. Additionally, it can be used to control pain, increase range of motion and help promote healing. Because of its broad range of applications, acupuncture can be used during any of the phases of injury. The focus is not only to treat the injury but also to treat any underlying conditions that may predispose an individual to injuries. This is especially important when treating chronic or recurrent injuries that interfere with life activities or athletic performance.

Injuries occurring from sports are mostly due to trauma or overuse syndromes involving the musculoskeletal system and its soft tissues. Trauma to these soft tissues, including ligaments, tendons and muscles are generally the result from falls, blows, sprains/strains, collisions, compressions crushing and disruptions of the healing processes due to inflammation.

### Some Commonly Treated Sports Injuries:

- ▣ Muscle Pull
- ▣ Neck Pain
- ▣ Shoulder Impingement
- ▣ Tennis Elbow
- ▣ Lower Back Strain
- ▣ Groin Pull
- ▣ Hamstring Strain
- ▣ Runner's Knee
- ▣ Shin Splints
- ▣ Ankle Sprain
- ▣ Achilles Tendonitis
- ▣ Arch Pain

	
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**If you have suffered an injury, want to avoid surgery, or would like to speed your post surgical recovery, acupuncture can help. Please [call an acupuncturist in your area](#) for more information or to schedule an appointment today.**

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