

# Sinusitis

## Summary Sheet

### Evidence-Based Assessment of Acupuncture Series

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#### Sinusitis Overview

Sinusitis refers to an infection of the sinus cavities, and is almost always accompanied by nasal inflammation (rhinitis).<sup>1</sup> Medically termed *rhinosinusitis*,<sup>2</sup> this prevalent condition affects an estimated 1 in 8 U.S. adults resulting in over 30 million annual diagnoses.<sup>3</sup>

The most prominent symptoms include facial pressure/pain, ache, fever, fatigue, congestion, and postnasal drip.<sup>1</sup> If symptoms fail to improve in 10 days, bacterial infection is suspected (60%), while those with persistent but resolving symptoms (40%), have likely contracted viral sinusitis.<sup>1</sup>

Hand washing is key to reduce risk of developing acute viral sinusitis, which often leads to a bacterial infection and subsequent exacerbations of chronic sinusitis.<sup>4</sup> Antibiotics are only recommended for patients with severe acute bacterial sinusitis (moderate-severe pain or >100°F).<sup>4</sup> Others are advised to relieve symptoms with the use of over-the-counter pain relievers, decongestants, nasal steroids, and nasal saline irrigation.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the high prevalence of sinusitis, there is limited uniformity in treatment.<sup>5</sup> Response to care also varies, and patients commonly seek alternative treatment options. A U.S.-based survey indicated that approximately 20% of individuals presenting to an Ear, Nose & Throat clinic utilized acupuncture for the treatment of sinusitis.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, a survey in Taiwan found that 29% of patients with sinusitis used Traditional Chinese Medicine in addition to usual care.<sup>7</sup>

#### Sinusitis in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

TCM practitioners view the body in terms of *Qi*-dynamics and use unique and specific terminology. This is best summarized by the axiom *“one pattern many diseases, one disease many patterns;”* suggesting that identification of the correct pattern (e.g. Kidney *Qi* deficiency) leads to improved patient care through the selection of pattern-specific acupuncture points.

In the case of sinusitis, patients are commonly categorized into 1 of 7 patterns.<sup>8</sup> TCM-theory suggests that both internal ‘organ-system’ factors (e.g. Lung *Qi* deficiency) and external ‘elemental’ factors, e.g. ‘wind-heat’ (virus and/or bacteria), lead to *qi* blockage in the Lung-system and subsequent symptoms.

Generally speaking, patients can expect acupuncture performed both locally and distally, with the goal of opening the meridians, removing ‘external elemental factors, and supporting the ‘organ systems’.<sup>8</sup> In addition to acupuncture, treatments may also include herbal medicine, moxibustion (heat therapy) and home therapies such as nasal washes.

*“Where there is free flow there is no pain, where there is pain there is no free flow.”*

#### Findings from the Acupuncture Research

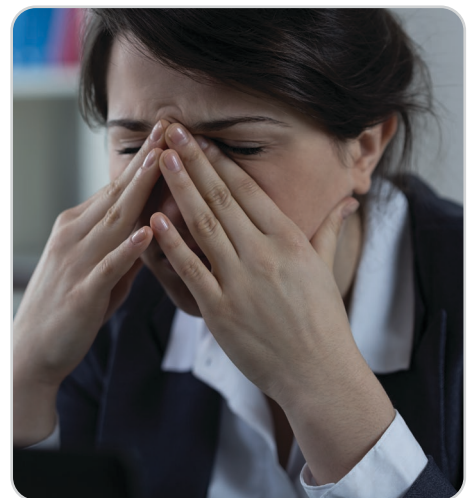
Limited trials have been conducted investigating the effects of acupuncture for the treatment of sinusitis.

- A small (65 participants) clinical trial suggests acupuncture is as effective as usual care for the treatment of chronic sinusitis.<sup>9,10</sup>



#### Summary and Commentary

Sinusitis is a common condition with substantial medical costs (~\$11 billion annually).<sup>1</sup> Current usual medical care options such as antibiotics, decongestants, corticosteroids, and even surgery often provide only temporary relief, which can lead to chronic symptoms. Subsequently, patients often seek care with alternative options such as acupuncture.<sup>6</sup> Only two trials have been conducted on the effects of acupuncture for chronic sinusitis, and each used a different treatment protocol.<sup>9-11</sup> The most recent trial provided 2-3 acupuncture treatments per week for 1 month. More clinical trials are needed to determine the benefits of acupuncture for the treatment of sinusitis.



## Scope and Purpose of Evidence-Based Assessment of Acupuncture Project

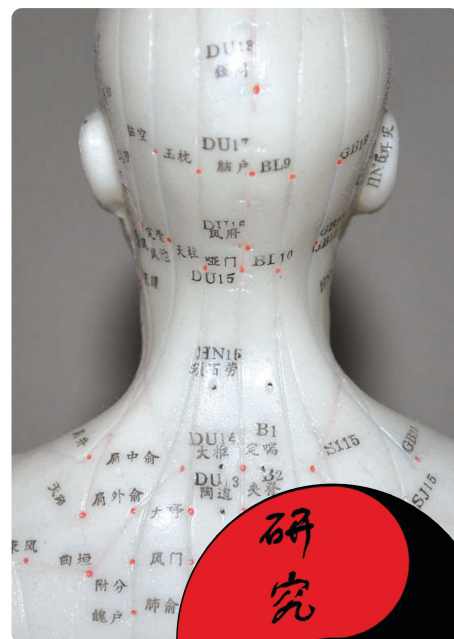
This project is supported by the Society for Acupuncture Research. It includes a growing library of condition specific assessments and summary sheets on topics such as dysmenorrhea, low back pain, neck pain, etc. Our aim is to evaluate the literature with a focus on systematic reviews and randomized controlled trials. When appropriate, other levels of evidence (e.g. case studies) are also referenced. The goal of the project is to inform policy-makers, clinicians, and the public of trends in the acupuncture literature and to provide expert commentary on the state of this evidence.

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