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## Acupuncture and Hypnosis: Better Together?

*Do you know what would happen if you combined acupuncture with hypnosis? Would using both at the same time work better than either one alone?*

**ANDREW WEIL, M.D.** | JANUARY 8, 2007

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You raise an interesting question – and one that my colleague Steven Gurgevich, Ph.D.,

has been investigating. Steve teaches mind/body medicine at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine (AzCIM) here at the University of Arizona, and is a faculty member of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. He became interested in combining **acupuncture** with hypnosis through a chance personal experience. One morning, Steve was having a 'bad day' with a headache. Elad Schiff, M.D., a certified acupuncturist from Israel who was also a AzCIM fellow, suggested performing hypnosis with Steve. Schiff also brought out some of his acupuncture needles.

"The results amazed me," Steve told me.

Intrigued by the results, Steve and Dr. Schiff recruited Opher Caspi, M.D., Ph.D., another physician training at AzCIM, to explore the question of whether acupuncture and hypnosis worked better together than either does separately. The result was an article called "Potential Synergism between Hypnosis and Acupuncture – Is the Whole More Than the Sum of its Parts?" published online October 31, 2006 in *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. In reviewing medical literature, the team found only one uncontrolled study and a few case reports on the subject (one of the case reports concerned how hypnosis augmented acupuncture treatment of headache; another showed that the combination worked for a patient with a severe gag reflex after each treatment failed to work on its own).

In their article, Drs. Gurgevich, Schiff and Caspi present a theoretical basis for how hypnosis and acupuncture could potentially augment each other if administered at the same time. They note that treatments often work better when patients expect that they will help, and that this expectation could potentiate the effect of acupuncture and hypnosis used together. They also suggest that acupuncture could help deepen the hypnotic state, which makes patients more suggestible and can heighten the effect of hypnotherapy.

Steve and his team emphasize that much more study is needed before recommending that hypnosis and acupuncture be used together on a routine basis. But they appear optimistic that studies will prove their hypothesis that a combination of the two therapies will work better than either used alone. I'll keep you posted on this research as it progresses.

Andrew Weil, M.D.



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