

NUTRITION + WELLNESS

Everything You Need to Know About Penelope Cruz's Needle-Free Acupuncture Therapy

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Acupuncture is known to relieve a number of conditions, including everything from depression and anxiety to nausea, migraines, and even infertility. But it also involves needles. So what happens if you're needle phobic? Well, if you're Penelope Cruz or Matt Damon, you try auriculotherapy and AcuLaser instead. The two actors [are reportedly fans](#) of the two techniques, which are offered at [Shellie Goldstein Associates](#), an acupuncture clinic with locations in Manhattan and East Hampton.

Both auriculotherapy and AcuLaser connect with the basic tenet of [acupuncture](#) — the stimulation of the body's "meridians" to promote and restore the balance of energy ("Qi") which flows throughout the body — and they're both needle-free.

In the name of learning more about how to tap into good Qi, we dug a little deeper about these alternative practices.

What Are They Exactly?

"At our practice we refer to these modalities as 'acupuncture without needles,' says Audrey Greenfield MD LAc, an associate at Shellie Goldstein. "Like traditional or conventional acupuncture, these techniques stimulate specific points found along acupuncture meridians. However, instead of using needles to stimulate these points, auriculotherapy (which we also refer to as 'ear acupressure') uses 'pressure' at locations on the ear, and AcuLaser uses laser light."

Greenfield further explains that, for auriculotherapy, acupuncturists at her practice use acupressure, or massage, at specific points by applying small vaccaria seeds or [crystals](#) at precise locations on the ear. "Affixing these seeds or crystals to the ear empowers patients to continue their treatment even after leaving the office by gently massaging the points whenever want relief from their symptoms," she says.

Before applying AcuLaser, Greenfield uses bioelectronic meridian testing to help determine which points are best to treat.

"Bioelectronic meridian testing entails measuring the electrical impedance at key acupoints called 'source points' found at locations near the wrists and ankles," she says. "These measurements are taken in the office with a small machine. It only takes a few minutes, and it is completely painless. This testing can reveal us imbalances, thus showing me which points will best help each patient."

What Are the Benefits?

According to Greenfield, because the only difference between the two practices and acupuncture is the lack of needles, then "auriculotherapy and AcuLaser have the potential to offer all the same benefits and treat all the conditions which acupuncture treats," she says. "Like traditional acupuncture, these treatments can treat sleep disorders, pain, anxiety, addiction, digestive disorders, side effects of chemotherapy, and a whole host of other issues."

She adds that "side benefits," not 'side effects,' might be a better way to describe the common effects of treatment beyond treating specific symptoms. "Patients often report that they [sleep](#) better (especially the night after treatment). Although anxiety is a common reason for seeking acupuncture, even patients who see us for completely non-related issues report an improved sense of overall well being."

What Are the Cons?

Though the practices provide an alternative for patients with needle phobia, or someone who is otherwise unable to tolerate needling, Amanda Frick, ND, LAc, lead naturopathic doctor for [Harvey Health](#), says the downsides of both auriculotherapy and AcuLaser "are that it's not part of traditional [Chinese medicine](#), and has far less research to back up its efficacy, and may be utilized by untrained practitioners."

She adds, "While I think acupuncture, auriculotherapy and AcuLaser may all be utilized for different functions, traditional acupuncture has the most well studied benefit, is part of a complete and very old system of medicine, as well as a set of highly skilled and licensed practitioners."

The Takeaway

If you're curious about acupuncture but terrified of needles, then, as Greenfield says, these practices “can provide an excellent introduction or ‘gateway’ to acupuncture. Acupuncture— with or without needles— is a powerful modality with the potential to address a wide variety of acute and chronic issues.”

And as with anything new and health-related, it's also best to heed Frick's advice.

“I highly recommend doing your research to find the best practitioner for you and your needs,” she says. “Part of the beauty of this ancient art is the intricate relationship of patient and healer. You have to feel comfortable with your practitioner. There is also an esoteric and energetic component that you'll be completely missing out on if you don't find the right fit. Once you've found your match, have a discussion about your comfort level, preferences and utilize the method that most closely aligns with your goals and beliefs.”