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Acupuncture without needles is the latest celebrity health craze

By Dana Wood

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Auriculotherapy and AcuLaser are two new needle-free alternatives to traditional acupuncture.

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What if you could get the benefits of acupuncture, a centuries-old healing modality rooted in Chinese medicine, without having dozens of scary needles poking into your body? And maybe even become so chill you look refreshed?

Enter auriculotherapy and AcuLaser, two new sharp-free treatments offered at Shellie Goldstein Associates, an acupuncture enclave with outposts in Manhattan and East Hampton. Both tap into the basic tenet of acupuncture — the stimulation of the body's “meridians” to generate health — and while they're not marketed as cosmetic, they're relaxing, which can pay dividends in the looks department (see: Penélope Cruz and Matt Damon, fans of the technique).

As the name implies, auriculotherapy is ear-centric. During the initial \$150 session, Goldstein does an intake, then sticks adhesive-backed gold-plated pellets decorated with Swarovski crystals onto the outer ears. The beads are then massaged at reflex points; there are more than 200, corresponding to different parts of the body, says Goldstein.



Matt Damon (left) and Penélope Cruz are said to be fans of the new “acupuncture” techniques.

Getty Images; PacificCoastNews.

About five of the pellets will be attached to each ear, and will stay put for up to five days. Once they fall off, you have the option of DIY-ing with take-home kits, or swinging by the office for a \$30 or \$40 refill.

AcuLaser, meanwhile, deploys targeted light beams instead of needles to stimulate meridians. “It's nonablative laser therapy,” says medical doctor and acupuncturist Audrey Greenfield, meaning it doesn't damage the epidermis. “It's for overall health and well-being, and a side benefit is that your skin will be clearer, and your sleep will improve.”

Pricier than auriculotherapy, AcuLaser is \$395 for the first visit, which lasts 45 minutes and includes an intake as well as a “baseline bioelectronic meridian testing/analysis” and customized treatment. Follow-ups cost \$295 for 30 minutes and \$195 for 20 minutes.

As promising as these new needle-free options sound, not every holistic health expert is on board.

Although she recommends classic acupuncture to patients at her Rye Brook, NY, clinic and gets it herself, integrative medicine doc Susan Blum says the jury is still out on the alternative type. While there are myriad studies on the efficacy of traditional acupuncture, that's not the case with needleless. “People who don't want needles can try it, and see if it works for them,” says Blum. “But I can't recommend it yet. Certainly not as an option to the real thing, which is tried and true.”

Even so, Goldstein believes in its therapeutic effects, especially for patients who are needle-phobes. “So many people want to experience acupuncture for health or beauty, but the thought of needles is too much to bear,” she says. “I've been thinking for a while about how we can not scare them.”

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- Doctor Audrey Greenfield

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