

# Migraines

Reducing the frequency and severity of migraine headaches with acupuncture

## WHAT IS MIGRAINES?

Migraines are a neurological disorder characterized by recurrent, often debilitating headaches — typically pulsating, unilateral, and accompanied by nausea, light sensitivity, or visual disturbances. Affecting roughly 39 million Americans, migraines are three times more common in women than men and can severely impair quality of life. Triggers include hormonal changes, stress, sleep disruption, certain foods, and environmental factors.

## HOW CAN ACUPUNCTURE HELP?

- Reduces migraine frequency: a landmark Cochrane Review (2016, updated 2022) of 22 randomized trials found acupuncture was at least as effective as prophylactic drug therapy in reducing migraine days per month.
- Modulates trigeminovascular pain pathways — the core mechanism of migraine — by influencing nociceptive signaling in the trigeminal nucleus caudalis.
- Lowers levels of CGRP (calcitonin gene-related peptide), a neuropeptide strongly associated with migraine attacks, by a mechanism similar to the newer CGRP-targeted biologics.
- Addresses common migraine triggers such as neck muscle tension, sleep disturbance, and stress — treating the whole pattern rather than only the acute attack.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Acupuncture for migraines is used as a preventive (prophylactic) treatment rather than a rescue therapy for acute attacks. A standard course is 10 sessions over 5–8 weeks, with most patients experiencing a measurable reduction in migraine frequency by session 6. Your practitioner will track the number, duration, and severity of your migraines to measure progress. After completing a course, many patients maintain results with monthly booster sessions.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PRACTITIONER

- 1 Should I keep a migraine diary, and how will you use that information to adjust my treatment?
- 2 Can acupuncture be used alongside my current migraine medications, including triptans?
- 3 Are there identifiable trigger patterns in my case that acupuncture can specifically address?

