

## Electroacupuncture: Promising pain therapy or quackery?

One idea [for alternative pain relief] is to specifically stimulate nerves that act as highway carriers of pain signals and block those signals like a [DDoS attack](#)—using some sort of sharp neural interface. If [the brain](#) can't process pain signals coming in, then you don't consciously feel any pain.

Sound familiar?

This month, [a team](#) from Harvard Medical School, Baylor College of Medicine, and China united East with West took another look at a revamped form of acupuncture—electroacupuncture, which hits the same acupoints as the practice has for centuries, but with mild electrical pulses.

In mice given life-threatening injections of an immune-stimulating chemical called lipopolysaccharide (LPS), the team found that electroacupuncture could lower the amount of pro-inflammatory chemicals and double the mice's survival rate—but only if the mice were first zapped with electricity.

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In a way, electroacupuncture is a sort of bridge between the old and new: it brings acupuncture and its theories, rooted in thousands of years of history, into the future. An electro-acupuncture needle is in one view a minimally-invasive neural interface that only pierces the top of the skin. And yet, guided by ancient acupunctural maps, it manages to interface with our nerves to reduce inflammation and pain—at least for two points, and in mice.

Do I still roll my eyes at acupuncture? To be honest, yeah. But I'm willing to give it another look.

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