

# How to Incorporate Acupuncture Into Your Fitness Routine

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Whether you're a weekend warrior or a seasoned marathoner, there are many ways acupuncture can benefit your fitness routine. Acupuncture prevents sports- and exercise-related injuries, accelerating recovery post-injury, and relieving tight, sore muscles.

Ultimately, when and how often you receive acupuncture will depend on which of these benefits you're aiming for. Here, we dive deeper into each of the main advantages and offer specific recommendations for incorporating acupuncture into your fitness routine.

## Acupuncture for Tight, Sore Muscles

Exercise offers tons of benefits, but it can also come with some less-than-pleasant side effects—namely, muscle tightness and soreness.

Activities like strength training and downhill running create small tears in your muscles. While these small tears generally lead to positive effects you associate with an exercise — like greater strength and muscle mass — the repair process can be a little rough.

As your body sets out to repair those tears, inflammation kicks in, leading to that familiar sensation of soreness and tightness. Because it takes a little while for this process to get going, it can take 24-48 hours for you to feel that tightness and soreness. This phenomenon is known as delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). It tends to be more noticeable after new activities, strength training, and eccentric movements like downhill running.

DOMS isn't necessarily bad, but it can make exercise and daily movement tricky or even painful.

[Research shows](#) that acupuncture may help ease post-workout symptoms. Acupuncture increases blood flow and releases tight spots before they get sore. This will help your muscles

maintain their normal, healthy length, which allows them to move through their full range of motion. The result: Easier, better movement, and a quicker return to your workout routine.

### When to Get Acupuncture for Tight or Sore Muscles

Follow up an intense workout with an acupuncture session. Try to go later in the day, the next day, or a few days after your workout to release muscle tightness and lingering soreness.

### Acupuncture for Injury Prevention

Many exercise-related injuries can often be traced back to the accumulated effects of tight, constricted muscle tissue. When muscles get tight from exercise, they can't work to their full potential, which means other muscles have to start helping out. This creates strength imbalances, increases soft tissue tightness, and adds stress to muscles, joints, and tendons. Leading to a wide variety of overuse injuries, from tendonitis and bursitis to plantar fasciitis and IT band syndrome.

If done regularly, acupuncture can help prevent these and other exercise-related injuries. Acupuncture promotes blood circulation to the muscles, releases accumulated soft tissue tightness, and relieves inflammation. It can also help you identify and resolve muscle imbalances before they become painful.

### When to Get Acupuncture for Injury Prevention

Visit your acupuncturist at least once a month to release accumulated muscle tightness from your workouts. Suppose you're a high-level athlete, or you're training for an event (ex. marathon, powerlifting competition). In that case, weekly sessions may help ward off an injury during peak training periods.

### Acupuncture for Injury Recovery

If you do get injured, acupuncture on its own or combined with physical therapy may help you return to play more quickly. Acupuncture helps release tight muscles, boost circulation, and ease inflammation. All these actions can decrease any pain you experience in the injured areas, helping you achieve a greater range of motion. (The [American Pain Society](#) notes that acupuncture is an effective treatment for various types of chronic pain, including musculoskeletal pain.) When coupled with physical therapy, this can make your PT exercises easier — not to mention more pleasant — to do.

Plus, acupuncture can help release any fresh muscle tightness that may accumulate from performing the exercises in your new PT regimen. After all, chances are your muscles aren't accustomed to your PT exercises' demands yet, which can lead to muscle soreness and tightness.

### When to Get Acupuncture For Injury Recovery

As a general recommendation, it's a good idea to get acupuncture in conjunction with physical therapy 1-2 times per week for 4-12 weeks. However, the specifics will ultimately

depend on the nature and severity of your injury. Work with your acupuncturist and physical therapist to design the best regimen for your injury.

### How to Find An Acupuncturist for Sports Treatment

There are many different styles of acupuncture and other areas of specialization within each style, so it's important to find a practitioner who fits your needs. If you're looking for sports and exercise benefits, check that your practitioner focuses on orthopedic and sports acupuncture. You can also ask your practitioner if they have training in trigger point acupuncture or dry needling; these are two styles that are especially effective for muscle tightness and sports injuries.

Find a licensed acupuncturist in your state by searching the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine ([NCCAOM](#)) practitioner directory.

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