

## Dictionary

## pla·ce·bo

/plə'sēbō/

## noun

noun: **placebo**; plural noun: [placebos](#)

1. a harmless pill, medicine, or procedure prescribed more for the psychological benefit to the patient than for any physiological effect."his Aunt Beatrice had been kept alive on sympathy and placebos for thirty years"
- a substance that has no therapeutic effect, used as a control in testing new drugs.
  - a measure designed merely to calm or please someone.



If you activated the link above in the word [placebos](#) you now know a lot about the placebo effect, so if you didn't, do it now. I've followed **Ted Kaptchuk** and **Dr. Irving Hirsch** for some years. Their research is state-of-the-art, something users of acupuncture have bandied about for years. Harvard seems to be the hot bed of placebo research so let's turn now to researchers [Richard Harris and V. Napadow](#) who used PET scans to tell the difference between sham acupuncture (*placebo*) and traditional Chinese acupuncture. This is one of the most important literature references to direct difference between true acupuncture and placebo responses. It says that neuroscience proves that acupuncture is both. Let me quote the article:

*"...Acupuncture therapy also evoked long-term increases in MOR binding potential in some of the same structures including the cingulate (dorsal and perigenual), caudate, and amygdala. These short- and long-term effects were absent in the sham group where small reductions were observed, an effect more consistent with previous placebo PET studies. Long-term increases in MOR BP following TA were also associated with greater reductions in clinical pain. These findings suggest that divergent MOR processes may mediate clinically relevant analgesic effects for acupuncture and sham acupuncture."*

**Vitaly Napadow**



But we must keep in mind here that both psychotherapy and antidepressant treatment are known to have a *placebo* effect. But, the patients who come to us report no positive effect after several years of treatment, suggesting that these patients are not as prone to placebo as others.

So, let's say that we know that acupuncture has a placebo effect. As large placebos work better than small placebos, penetration of the skin should have more of a placebo effect than taking a pill. But there again, the placebo effect is largely limited to the time the sham treatment is applied, where it is also known that traditional acupuncture treatment lasts much longer than the treatment period and has more physiological effects, in particular ones which emulate changes in the medial prefrontal brain (MPFC). In the case of 5-point ear acupuncture the effects most often are seen to increase in the 6 months following treatment. When mindfulness generated by ear acupuncture is measured in the same way as the Kabat-Zinn mindfulness meditation researchers measure it, values are seen to increase by 50% in the 6 months following 5 point ear acupuncture treatment. This is a long time for a placebo to be working. And the magnitude of the effect is not really placebo-like. It's far beyond it!

In our first ten years of AcuDestress, we both assiduously avoided talking to the patient to follow the dictum held by Dr. Smith. Perhaps that was unnecessary, given that we have been able to add spoken interventions and get 50% better results each time, but we are still dealing with a population segment who don't have the genetic variations which lead to placebo effects. Undoubtedly there is considerable skill in play with *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*, but the positive effects are purported to come from insight derived from rethinking one's problems, and not just by the attention paid to them by the person administering treatment. Placebo means "*I please!*"

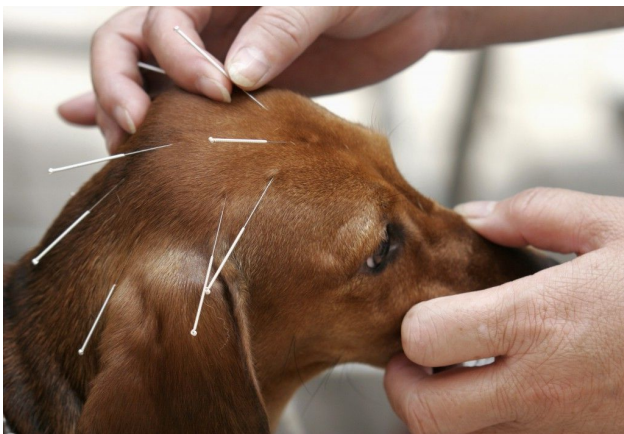
Then there is the (delightful) problem of knowing that acupuncture results in domestic animals parallel those in

humans, and we cannot attribute the positive effects to the animal

thinking things out in a new and different way. Placebo?

My own initiation to acupuncture came after I had had many impossibly positive results treating migraine, arthritis, organic entities like ulcerative colitis, hay fever and low thyroid function. But things were never so confirming as when I was sitting on a scaffolding 10 feet off the ground, when the scaffolding collapsed and I fell with my ankle resting under the board I'd been sitting on. I'd been enjoying considerable success with acupuncture, but I was chief-of-the-medical-staff at two local hospitals so I headed straight there, even though I could not even walk.

After the nurses did all they could for me, I stood outside the ER doors with my crutches, realizing I still couldn't even put my foot on the ground. Then I remembered my colleague across town, whom I'd gotten interested in acupuncture. I headed to his place, He tore off all the splinting and taping, put the pins in, and twenty minutes later sent me out to walk around the block. I felt nothing, walked perfectly and have never felt a shred of pain in the 40 years since. Was it placebo? Perhaps, but a full and total removal of pain and suddenly no swelling around the injured joint? Generally placebos are deemed not lower one's cholesterol or repair a cut, but where does this fit? Well, I know where it fits for me.



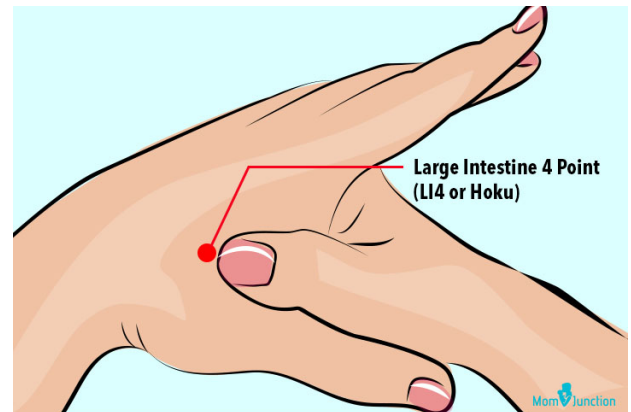




Then there was the couple who'd had trouble conceiving. I'd pinned such couples before and several of them got pregnant. While I saw them in our stress reduction context I was seeing repeated failures of sperm implantation wearing on them, as there remained a hormonal problem. Whether that depended on attitude or proclivity to depression or whatever, everything came together with 5-point ear acupuncture. They were pregnant in no time. And much happier!

## So, if not a placebo, what is going on here?

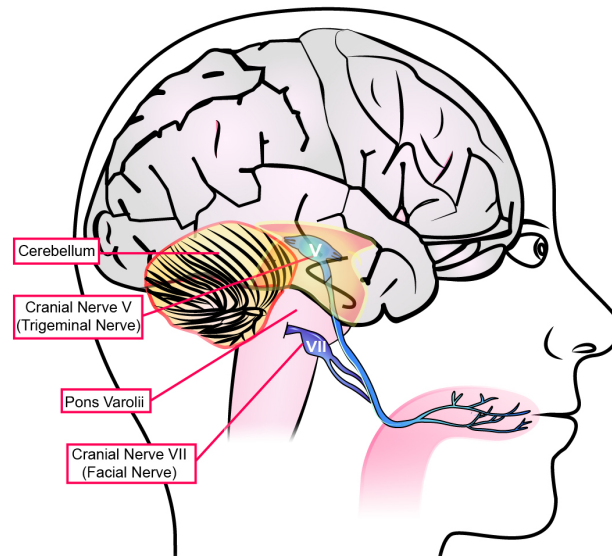
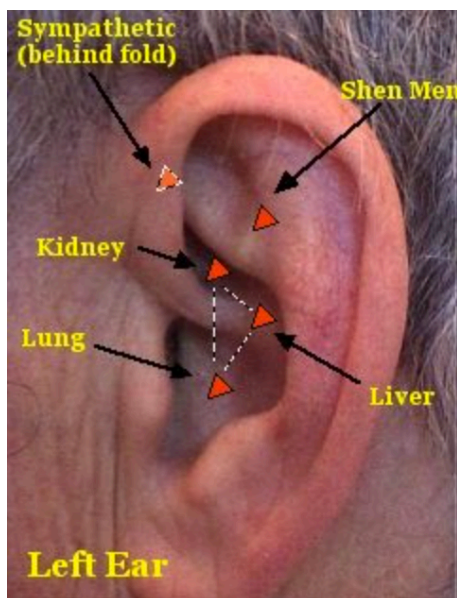
Acupuncture is said to exert its effects largely in the central nervous system, and not so much in the periphery of the body where it is applied. This point, called Hoku or Large Intestine 4 is often used to treat a headache. In fact, there was a time when the hospital I worked at was told it was no longer insured for acupuncture (the insurer was owned by big pharma.) What we did as doctors was to inject Hoku with 1 c.c. of xylocaine and the headache was gone in 2-3 minutes. We did nothing to our patients to suggest this effect - but it always occurred. We know now that Hoku registers specific effects on the brain which differ from side to side. Hoku responds to touch (or massage) as well, explaining the effects of *Emotional Freedom Technique* which also uses acupuncture points



## Dr. Smith's ear acupuncture points

You will see here (on the right) that Canada's newest neuromodulator, **The Portable Neuromodulation Stimulator (PoNS™) Device**,

which is placed on the tongue and is seen to work by stimulating Cranial Nerves V and VII, the Trigeminal and the Facial nerves, stimulate the brain area under the ear. The PoNS has many of the same results as 5-point ear acupuncture, and so it makes sense that, when stimulated, these points have an effect on much the same brain area, the very region where acupuncture is seen to stimulate  $\mu$ -opioid receptors - the MPFC. **Neuromodulation** seems to be poised to be the future of mental health intervention. Andres Lozano's **Brodmann's Area 25** ( see Page23) is close to this area as well.



Knowing that some people are more responsive to placebo effects than others, and having accepted that there is a known placebo or sham effect associated with acupuncture, but unique and not the same as (and not as powerful as) the traditional Chinese treatment effect, the candidates we see - people with long histories (up to 30 years) of non-productive, results-free psychotherapy, and/or histories of often 5+ years on antidepressants without significant benefit, it does not seem that the placebo effect is a major player here. So what is the case for the other modalities which serve as neuromodulation treatment equivalents when acupuncture isn't used?

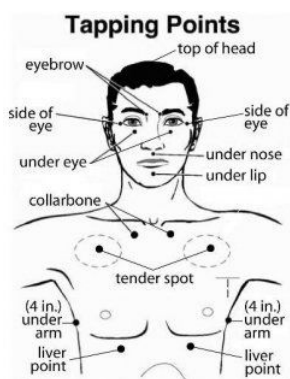
### What about Silva Mind Control meditation - Does it exert it a Placebo Effect?

Probably, yes. Students do receive advice and encouragement from teachers, who could be felt as a placebo is felt, and in turn feel buoyed up by results which follow the course's predictions. If this is a placebo effect is a pretty good one at that. And desirable. In Chapter 17 of Silva's book - *A Psychiatrist Works With Mind Control*, Dr. Clancy D. McKenzie set out to see how workable it was, how safe it was for psychiatric patients, and what results could be expected.



His findings were largely strikingly positive, and he determined that he could send any of his more severely ill patients, including the most severely affected to *Mind Control* and expect good results. During a period of four and a half years, 189 psychiatric patients volunteered to go through *Mind Control* training. Dr. McKenzie focused on the patients in this group were psychotic, Borderline psychotic, or who had recovered from psychosis. There were 75 of these.

There was consistent improvement among this latter group. *“As a part in study McKenzie tested 58 of these patients before and after the course to see what changes it might cause. The test, the Experiential World Inventory, consists of 400 questions designed to measure a person's perception of reality something like the famous Rorschach ink blot test but in written form. The differences between the before and after scores was impressive: 36 showed dramatic improvement in reality perception, 21 remained about the same and one showed a drop.”* My guess would be that the results are impressive but not entirely due to the patients, but due to how closely to Silva's ideas the course is presented.



### And the Emotional Freedom Technique?

Certainly there can be a teacher's exhortation to the student to follow the supposedly beneficial procedures of tapping on the acupressure points. This is the direct opposite of Smith's acupuncture, during which there is no pressure on the recipients to do anything. NADA. So this is a process of mutual support and socialization for everyone involved. Is there a placebo effect? Most certainly!

### What About Power of Eight?

If someone prompts you to undertake certain activities like sending good vibes to somebody else in the world, certainly in the sense of placebo (“I please you!”) there is something in it for you. It's like something would be in it for you from your taking that pill. Lynne McTaggart teaches that. The reason's not entirely altruistic. **Anyone providing these three skills should well aware that the placebo effect here is quite a bit different from AcuDestress, where the two effects go hand in hand.**

