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Pins and needles relieve hay fever

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A NEEDLE may help unblock your nose.

A study, published in the latest issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia*, has shown that acupuncture can help relieve the symptoms of chronic hay fever.

Sixteen per cent of Australians suffer from persistent nasal allergies, or rhinitis, while many suffer seasonal allergies.

Charlie Xue, a professor of Chinese medicine at RMIT University in Melbourne, showed that two months of acupuncture reduced the symptoms of persistent rhinitis - sneezing, itchy and blocked nose, and rhinorrhoea (runny nose) - for at least three months.

While there was a big reduction in only one of the symptoms - rhinorrhoea - patients reported "significant relief" overall in the four symptoms, he said.

Patients were allowed to use pharmaceutical treatments such as antihistamines and nasal sprays during the study to relieve symptoms but reported a drop in usage.

Some treatments can dry out nasal membranes and lead to nose bleeds but the only adverse effects reported in the study were those of any acupuncture treatment - occasional pain and bruising from the needles - but not enough for any of the patients to pull out of the treatment.

Professor Xue's subjects had to be allergic to dust mites, pet hair and grass pollen. While the study defined persistent allergic rhinitis as reporting symptoms for more than four days a week for four weeks, some of the subjects had suffered for up to 20 years, Professor Xue said.

The 80 patients had needles inserted in five to seven places on the body twice a week for eight weeks and their symptoms were monitored for the next 12 weeks. The reported relief continued until the end of the monitoring period.

Professor Xue said it was not clear how acupuncture worked on rhinitis but the treatment had been proven to help immunity and he would study its effect on seasonal rhinitis next year.

Now a student from the University of Technology, Sydney, wants to see if acupuncture can help with depression.

Kirk Wilson is recruiting subjects who are taking medication for major depression for a study. Phone 9231 3377.

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