

Editorial

## Long-Term Effects of Auricular Medicine – A Key to the Future of Preventive Medicine?

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### Abstract

Auricular medicine, based on the concept that the ear reflects the entire body, has gained recognition for treating various conditions through targeted acupuncture. Despite documented short-term benefits, such as pain relief and nervous system regulation, research into its long-term effects is limited. This editorial discusses the need for further long-term studies to explore whether regular auricular acupuncture can offer sustained health benefits and serve a preventive role. It summarizes two studies: one on auricular therapy with magnetic pearls for elderly insomnia and another on frequency-controlled ear acupuncture for COVID-19-related olfactory dysfunction. Both studies suggest potential benefits, underscoring the importance of continued research to fully understand and harness auricular medicine's preventive and therapeutic potential.



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## **Keywords**

Auricular medicine; long-term effects; Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); auriculotherapy; acupuncture; ear stimulation

## **1. Introduction**

Auricular medicine, based on the principle that the ear reflects the entire body as a microsystem, has gained increasing recognition in recent decades [1]. This form of acupuncture targets specific points on the ear to address various physical and psychological conditions and is now widely used in clinical settings. While the short-term benefits, such as pain relief and nervous system regulation, are well documented, a significant gap remains in exploring the long-term effects of auricular medicine [2].

## **2. Need for Long-Term Research**

Most studies have focused on acupuncture treatments' immediate or short-term outcomes [3, 4]. Auricular medicine has shown promising results in areas like pain management, addiction therapy, and psychosomatic treatments [1]. However, comprehensive research into long-term effects is still lacking. The crucial question is: How enduring are these treatment outcomes? Could regular auricular acupuncture alleviate symptoms, promote long-term health, and serve a preventive role?

## **3. Previous Studies**

While there are numerous long-term studies on acupuncture in general (about 150 listed articles in PubMed as of September 15, 2024), there are currently only two studies listed under the keywords “long-term effects” and “auricular medicine” for auricular medicine or ear acupuncture. Two such studies are mentioned here:

One follow-up study examined the long-term effects of auricular therapy with magnetic pearls on elderly individuals with insomnia [5]. Participants were monitored at intervals after a 3-week treatment. Results indicated significant improvements in nocturnal sleep time and marginal improvements in sleep efficiency, which remained consistent over the 6-month follow-up period. These findings suggest that auricular therapy may have a lasting positive impact on the quality and quantity of sleep in older people [5].

Another randomized clinical trial investigated the effectiveness of frequency-controlled ear acupuncture in treating COVID-19-related olfactory dysfunction [6]. Forty patients were divided into an acupuncture group and a control group, receiving nasal betamethasone drops. The acupuncture group showed significant improvement in smell quality, while the control group did not. Some patients experienced mild, transient side effects. The study concludes that ear acupuncture may effectively treat COVID-19-related olfactory dysfunction [6].

#### **4. Opportunities and Challenges**

The potential for auricular medicine in preventive healthcare is compelling. If regular ear acupuncture has lasting positive effects on the immune system, nervous system, and overall well-being, it could significantly advance healthcare approaches. Auricular medicine could become a cornerstone of preventive health programs, contributing to longer lifespans and reducing chronic disease risks.

However, achieving this vision poses substantial challenges. Conducting robust long-term studies requires rigorous methodologies to yield valid and meaningful results. Variables such as individual responses to acupuncture, lifestyle differences, and genetic predispositions need careful consideration. Additionally, questions remain about the optimal frequency and duration of treatments required for achieving sustained benefits.

#### **5. Prevention as the Future Focus**

In preventive medicine, there is increasing demand for non-invasive, holistic approaches that support the body's natural regulatory mechanisms and disease prevention. Auricular medicine may offer significant potential in this regard. Early evidence suggests regular stimulation of specific ear points could strengthen the immune system, reduce stress, and enhance overall resilience. However, more clinical trials are necessary to substantiate these claims and understand the mechanisms involved.

#### **6. Sustainability and Health Economics**

Another dimension of auricular medicine's long-term effects is its potential contribution to healthcare sustainability. If preventive ear acupuncture can reduce or prevent long-term health problems, it could improve patients' quality of life and lower healthcare costs. Chronic illnesses, often requiring intensive and costly treatments, might be mitigated through regular preventive interventions, including auricular medicine.

#### **7. Conclusion**

Research into the long-term effects of auricular medicine is crucial for realizing its full potential. Such research could deepen our understanding of acupuncture and lead to new, sustainable approaches in preventive healthcare. As healthcare systems worldwide grapple with rising chronic diseases, auricular medicine may offer a gentle, effective, and potentially lasting treatment option. The future of auricular medicine may lie in its ability to treat acute conditions and its role as a preventive cornerstone of healthcare. Long-term studies will determine if this path can reshape our understanding of health and preventive care.

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## **Competing Interests**

The author hereby declares that no conflict of interests exists in connection with the publication of this editorial.

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