

## The NADA Protocol

In the mid-1970s, Michael Smith, a medical doctor at Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx area of New York, modified an existing system of auricular acupuncture into a simple technique for the treatment of many common drug addictions as an alternative to methadone. This selection of ear points proved to be extremely effective in the treatment of addictions, and became what is now referred to as the “NADA protocol.”

NADA – which is Spanish for “nothing” – is also the acronym for the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association. NADA was founded in 1985 by Dr. Smith and others who were interested in promoting the integration of the protocol in the treatment of addiction.



The original NADA protocol consisted of electrical stimulation on the Lung point of a patient’s ear. It was soon discovered, however, that manual needling of the same point produced a more prolonged effect than that produced by electric stimulation. Gradually, the protocol was expanded by adding *Shen Men*, a well-known ear point that produces a sensation of relaxation. Over the next few years, other points were added based on pain resistance, sensitivity, and other clinical factors. The NADA protocol as it exists today consists of the insertion of small, stainless-steel, disposable acupuncture needles into five points on the outer surface of a person’s ear. The points used in the NADA protocol are Sympathetic, *Shen Men*, Kidney, Liver, and Lung.

In a typical session, both ears of the patient are needled at the same time, usually for between 30 minutes and 45 minutes. Unlike many forms of acupuncture, the NADA protocol is delivered in a group setting. This is done to help build support among those being treated, and to break down factors of isolation.

In most cases, patients are cared for in a quiet, comfortable room, which gives them ample space to relax. All patients are treated equally, using the same protocol, which allows patients to overcome feelings of denial, and allows a practitioner to treat many patients at the same time. Depending on the location offering care, patients are often allowed to remove the needles themselves when the treatment session is over.

Addicts treated with the NADA protocol often report an improved sense of well-being. Clients often state that they feel “energized,” “lighter” and “more relaxed” after undergoing a session. Some practitioners assert that the insertion of the needles also provides a non-verbal tool, which allows patients to sit in a safe, supportive environment, and helps them prepare for the next step in the detoxification process.

Dozens of studies have documented the effectiveness of the NADA protocol. Among the benefits reported by patients and health care providers are: improved retention in drug treatment programs; more optimistic attitudes about detoxification and recovery; reductions in cravings and anxiety; fewer episodes of sleep disturbance; and reduced need for pharmaceuticals.

While the NADA protocol is an important component of any detoxification program, it is by no means the only component. A patient’s behavior and attitude, along with the perceptions of the clinician delivering care, are also integral to successful treatment. The NADA protocol is often used with other treatment modalities, such as counseling, support groups and self-help programs, to increase the overall effectiveness of care.

There are currently several thousand NADA-trained practitioners worldwide. For more information, visit [www.acudetox.com](http://www.acudetox.com), or call (360) 254-0186.



Page printed from:

[http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/abc/nadaprotocol.php?no\\_b=true](http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/abc/nadaprotocol.php?no_b=true)