

Acupuncture, Ancient Ways for Modern Times

As defined in *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary 29th Edition*, **acupuncture** (from **acus** meaning "needle" and **punctura** meaning "a pricking") is a "*traditional Chinese practice of insertion of fine needles into specific exterior body locations to relieve pain, to induce surgical anesthesia, and for therapeutic purposes.*"

Though at one time there may have been some doubts about the validity and efficacy of acupuncture in Western countries, but after years of documented successes there is little question that acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine are legitimate avenues of treatment for a wide range of individuals alternatives. Not only because of its long history of practice and observation in Eastern cultures, but increasing verification by the standards of Western medicine give acupuncture great credibility as a method of treatment, so that one could say that modern Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine are the two dominant medical systems in the world today.

The World Health Organization endorses acupuncture as a treatment for over 43 medical conditions, including:

- allergies
- asthma
- back pain
- carpal tunnel
- colds and flus
- constipation
- depression
- gynecological disorders
- headache
- heart problems
- insomnia
- sciatica
- sports injuries
- stress and
- tendonitis

Studies reported in *The Lancet Pain, alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, and other journals have confirmed that acupuncture is effective for chronic back pain, addictions, arthritis, and rheumatism.

Local and national studies demonstrate that Chinese medicine has a 40% rate of recovery for alcohol and drug addiction, compared to Western medicine with only 10% recovery rate. A 1996 Kaiser study found that 57.2% of primary care physicians in Northern California had used or recommended acupuncture in the previous year.

There are five basic points that underlie the principles and methods of this practice. According to **TCM**, or Traditional Chinese Medicine:

- Fourteen major energy channels, called **meridians**, course through the human body, including the head, hands, legs, feet, torso and internal organs.
- A subtle energy called "**Qi**" (pronounced "chee") circulates via the meridians to all parts of the body, even the most remote cells.
- **Qi** is considered the vital force, the presence of which separates the living from the dead. Its balanced, unimpeded flow is critical to sound health.
- Any misdirection, blockage, or other derangement of the amount, flow or balance of **Qi** may result in pain, dysfunction, and ill health or even death.
- With acupuncture needles or other means, the acupuncturist stimulates certain points **acupoints** along the course of the meridians. Such stimulation helps restore the normal balance and flow of **Qi** so that organs and bodily systems can work together in harmony as Nature intended. This helps

the body repair itself and maintain its own health.

Ancient Chinese physicians discovered that *Qi* circulates throughout the body along fourteen major channels, twelve of which are duplicated on the left and right side of the body. The two other major channels are located in the center of the body, one in the front and one in the back. There are a number of so-called **extra channels** and **miscellaneous channels** throughout the body. Today, all these channels are called meridians by English-speaking physicians. The meridians form a highly complex invisible network directing *Qi* to every area of the body, including the head, arms, legs, torso, organs, and organ systems. Over the centuries, the Chinese discovered hundreds of specific points in the meridians where *Qi* can be accessed and stimulated when its flow is disturbed. These points are called **acupoints**.

Since *Qi* is meant to travel freely through the meridian network, thereby providing the body with its balanced, harmonious vital force, any sustained blockage of it may bring on pain, a weakened immune system, and ill health. Such a blockage can have two effects on the flow of *Qi* through the meridians.

Visualize *Qi* as water through a pipe. If the pipe gets clogged, you have an almost empty pipe on one side and a buildup of water before the blockage. In the case of *Qi* in the meridians this would mean that a blockage may cause a deficiency of *Qi* beyond it or a buildup before it, which might mean diminished activity of some organs and/or accelerated activity of others.

Either way, the *Qi* is unbalanced and must be normalized through an acupuncturist's professional care. Typical acupuncture treatment plans require the use of 1 - 12 needles to

stimulate the acupoints and thereby normalize flow and distribution of *Qi*.

Typically, acupuncture needles are fine and flexible, no bigger around than a human hair or a piece of thread. When properly inserted into an acupoint, the needle produces little or no sensation. When it makes contact with *Qi*, some patients experience a slight tingling sensation.

Some points, such as those on the face and fingers, can be sensitive, but there is rarely any pain involved in an acupuncture treatment. This is because the needles are so fine; just as a mosquito's stinger can penetrate your skin without your feeling it; a fine enough needle is also nearly undetectable.

Most patients experience feelings of deep relaxation and well being during the treatment and for some time afterwards. Acupuncture can even create euphoric feelings (especially the first time) during the treatment and throughout the following day. This is because, in Western medical terms, it can stimulate the production of **endorphins**, hormones found mainly in the brain that reduce pain and elevate mood.

The list of things that can lead to a blocked or unbalanced flow of *Qi* is long. Some examples are:

- poor nutrition or adulterated food
- toxic air or water
- infectious or contagious diseases
- malfunction of an organ
- injuries, (ergonomic to overuse, as well as home, work, sports, and auto injuries)
- excessive dampness, wind, cold, or heat
- emotional responses to life, such as worry, anxiety, and stress.

Among the conditions most frequently treated are: addictions, allergies, ankle

swelling, arm and shoulder pain, arthritis, asthma, Attention Deficit Disorder, back pains, enuresis (bedwetting), high or low blood pressure, bronchitis, bursitis (inflammation of joint fluid sacs), carpal tunnel syndrome, poor circulation, colds, colitis, constipation, chronic cough, depression, detox for chemical dependency, diarrhea, digestive disorders, diverticulitis (intestinal inflammation), vertigo (dizziness), emphysema (lung disease), Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, cold feet, fibromyalgia (chronic muscle pain and fatigue), flu, gall bladder disorders, gynecological disorders, hay fever, headache, heart problems, hemorrhoids, hiccoughs, immune system deficiency, injuries, insomnia, joint pain, kidney problems, knee and leg pain, liver problems, stiff neck, nervousness, neuralgia (severe nerve pain), PMS, prostate problems, rheumatism (painful joint or muscle inflammation), sciatica (nerve pain of the lower back and thigh), herpes zoster (shingles), skin problems, sinus trouble, sore throat, thyroid conditions, ulcers, urinary problems, and whiplash.

While Western medicine is becoming more aware of the wide range of benefits that acupuncture and TCM possess, there is still a degree of narrow-mindedness and hesitation that permeates into the medical industry. This is why most Western doctors usually reserve the approval of acupuncture and TCM to pain relief and pain management, but much less so for other conditions.

Most likely, the next major area that Western medicine will no longer be able to ignore acupuncture's successes in is the area of fertility and childbirth. Acupuncture has a very precise system for improving fertility, normalizing menstrual cycles, and optimizing hormones for conception. In terms of TCM, pregnancy and childbirth cause

major shifts in Qi throughout a woman's body creating large opportunities for blockages and improperly channeled flows. Organ systems can be impeded, the uterine environment is especially sensitive to imbalances of heat and moisture, both of which are regulated by Qi. In order to ensure proper flows and provide the healthiest environment for fetal development, routine acupuncture can be extremely beneficial.

Depending on the patient's condition and the treatment plan, each treatment takes from thirty minutes to an hour. Since each patient's health problems differ from those of others, the number and frequency of treatments vary. A typical recommendation would be two to four week treatments a week for eight to sixteen weeks, although some patients respond favorably after only one or two treatments. Others may require two or three treatments a week for several months. In general, acute conditions (those of recent and sudden onset) require less treatment than chronic conditions (those of long standing).



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