

Acupuncture--It's Origins and How it Works

Acupuncture has been practiced in China for thousands of years. The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine is the first Chinese medical text and is dated at approximately 350 BC. Being a complete medical system, Chinese medicine has a treatment approach for nearly every health concern. Chinese medicine is born out of the Taoist tradition. Central to both Chinese medicine and Taoism is the necessity of balancing yin and yang (opposing but complementary properties) and living in harmony with one's environment.



Acupuncture heals by balancing the flow of "Chi," (pronounced "chee", sometimes spelled Qi), which is most commonly translated as "energy" or "life force". Every living thing has Chi! It flows throughout the body in a network of channels (also referred to as meridians). There are major channels associated with the organ systems, as well as many smaller connecting channels. Together, they create an interconnected system, similar to a system of interconnected roads and highways. The channels run on the surface of the body and also branch into the body's interior where they connect with organs, bones, tendons and joints. The channels on the surface of the body have points where the Chi collects. These are the acupuncture points and when needled, they have the ability to influence the flow of Chi in the whole channel. Acupuncture points have far-reaching effects. For example, there are points on the tips of the fingers that excel at treating headaches.

Chi is manifested on the physical, mental, and emotional levels. When Chi gets stuck, or stagnates, the result is physical pain, disease and mental/emotional unrest. There are several causes of Chi stagnation: emotional stress, physical trauma, poor diet and lifestyle issues to name a few. By inserting acupuncture needles into the acupuncture points, the blockages are removed allowing the Chi to flow smoothly & abundantly! and the body to heal. In a sense, the needles activate the body's innate system of healing.

Acupuncture is a cumulative therapy, meaning that the treatments build on each other. Almost every condition requires a course of treatment that varies depending on the individual. It is important to receive acupuncture frequently enough for it to provide the full benefits. Treatments spaced too far apart will not be as effective. Frequency of treatment also varies depending on the condition of the individual.

To the human body, acupuncture needles are a physical stimulus. In Western science, a stimulus is defined as a detectable change in either the external environment or within the body itself. When the body detects change, it produces a response. Although acupuncture is not yet fully understood by Western science, there is increasing interest in its outcomes and benefits. More resources are being invested in studying the clinical outcomes and mechanisms of action in acupuncture. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) has funded rigorous studies showing the effectiveness of acupuncture for conditions such as:

- chronic low back pain
- post-traumatic stress disorder, and
- knee arthritis
- fibromyalgia

In the West, acupuncture is most well-known for its ability to relieve pain, so the majority of research thus far has been done in this area. Through the use of functional MRI technology, scientists can now actually begin to "see" the brain response to acupuncture when a needle is inserted at a specific acupuncture point on the body. Current research is being conducted to better understand how acupuncture stimulates the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord), effects pain and mood-enhancing hormones, and influences the self-regulating systems of the body.

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We are often asked what acupuncture can treat. Here's a list:

Anxiety & Depression	Indigestion, Gas, Bloating, Constipation
Arthritis, Tendonitis, & Joint pain	Insomnia
Asthma & Allergies	Menopause Symptoms
Auto Injuries	Musculoskeletal pain
Bladder and Kidney Infections	Nausea
Cardiac Palpitations (Irregular Heartbeat)	Orthopedic Conditions
Chronic Fatigue Syndrome	Pain - other kinds
Common Cold & Influenza	PMS & Menstrual Irregularity
Degenerative Disk Disorders	Sports Injuries
Fibromyalgia	Tension / Stress Syndromes
Headaches & Migraines	Work Injuries
Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)	

It can be argued that many of the chronic illnesses (hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia) are due to the stressful lives we lead, the processed food we eat and our go-go lifestyles.

Unfortunately, most of us feel locked into these lives for one reason or another. Acupuncture deals very effectively with stress. Weekly treatments give you an hour of relaxation – sometimes the only hour that is truly yours all week. Acupuncture has been shown to release endorphins, normalize hormone levels and boost the immune system. We have seen people with severe chronic illness get their lives back in functional terms with frequent treatments i.e. 1-2 per week. What we mean by this is that people still have the chronic illness, but it no longer severely limits the things they can do in their lives. We also think that regular acupuncture treatments can help prevent the development of chronic illness.

Resources from the World Health Organization (WHO) and National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, (NCCAM) part of the NIH