

Acupuncture 101

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As a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I am often asked questions about what it is that I do. By far, the most common questions that I am asked are; "What is acupuncture?" "Is it safe?" "Does it hurt?" "What can it treat?" and "How can I find a reliable acupuncturist in my area?"

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is just one facet of the much broader field of Chinese Medicine - all of which is rooted in the philosophy of Taoism.

Underlying the practice of this ancient medicine is a unique view of the human body and of health. This view greatly differs from Western medical thought, and is based on the concept that we human beings are microcosms of the larger universe — firmly positioned between heaven and Earth, linked with nature, and subject to her forces. The aim of this medicine is not in treating health problems in isolation, but rather in addressing the individual (body *and* mind) as a whole, while taking one's surrounding environment into consideration, and bringing it all back into harmony to create a balanced state of health.

Acupuncture originated in China over 5,000 years ago and stands strong as one of the oldest healing practices in the world.

Acupuncture promotes the body's natural healing abilities. It involves the insertion of very fine needles into specific body points located along channels of energy known as meridians. The meridian system connects all of the major organs and body parts, and circulates the body's vital life energy, known as Qi (pronounced 'chee').

According to Chinese medical theory, illness arises when the cyclical flow of Qi through the meridians becomes unbalanced or blocked. Acupuncturists use the point/meridian system to access and activate the Qi, to promote the body's natural healing abilities and restore balanced health.

Is it safe?

Acupuncture is a safe and effective natural therapy. It has been safely employed on billions of patients for thousands of years. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of acupuncture needles by licensed acupuncturists in 1996 and require that they follow strict safety guidelines. Modern acupuncture needles are sterile, single-use, disposable, and should never be reused.

Does it hurt?

Acupuncture needles are tiny, thin, and flexible, and the sensation caused by insertion varies from patient to patient. The needles are 25 – 50 times thinner than hypodermic needles. So thin in fact, that several acupuncture

needles can fit inside the middle of a hypodermic needle. Most people feel nothing at all upon insertion of an acupuncture needle, while others may experience a brief moment of discomfort as the needle penetrates the skin.

What can it treat?

Patients may see an acupuncturist for any number of conditions ranging from musculoskeletal to fertility issues.

Some of the major benefits of Acupuncture are that it is a holistic approach to health and healing, assists in preventing disease, and provides drug-free pain relief.

Acupuncture can effectively treat many common ailments. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) currently lists quite a few conditions that have been proven through clinical trial to be effectively treated by acupuncture:

Adverse reactions to chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy, Allergic rhinitis (including hay fever), Biliary colic (gallstones), Depression (including depressive neurosis and depression following stroke), Dysentery, acute bacillary, Dysmenorrhoea, primary, Epigastralgia, acute (in peptic ulcer, acute and chronic gastritis, and gastrosplasm), Facial pain (including craniomandibular disorders), Headache, Hypertension, essential, Hypotension, primary, Induction of labour, Knee pain, Low back pain, Morning sickness, Nausea and vomiting, Neck pain, Pain in dentistry (including dental pain and temporomandibular dysfunction), Periarthritis of shoulder, Postoperative pain, Renal colic (pain caused by kidney stones) Rheumatoid arthritis, Sciatica (pain, weakness, numbness, or tingling in the leg caused by injury to or compression of the sciatic nerve), Sprains, Stroke, Tennis elbow,

How can I find a reliable acupuncturist in my area?

The best guideline for choosing an acupuncturist is to ask friends and family for referrals. Once you have found an acupuncturist in your area, you should verify his/her qualifications. Be sure to check for state licensure and training credentials.

Not all states require an acupuncturist to be licensed, but an acupuncturist must possess a certificate of course completion from an accredited institution such as the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncturists (NCCAOM). You can find or verify an NCCAOM certified practitioner in your area online at <http://www.nccaom.org/>.

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