

Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Acupuncture is a branch of ancient Chinese medicine that is based on principles developed in China over the past 2000 years. It is estimated that somewhere between 10 and 15 million Americans spend approximately \$500 million a year on acupuncture for treatment of many common medical problems.

The most common claim of success by acupuncture advocates is in the area of pain control. Studies have shown that many acupuncture points are more richly supplied with nerve endings than are the surrounding skin areas. Some research indicates sticking needles into certain points affects the nervous system and stimulates the body's production of natural painkilling chemicals such as endorphins and enkephalins. It also triggers the release of certain neural hormones including serotonin – a hormone that induces a “happy” state. In addition, studies have shown that acupuncture may alter brain chemistry by changing the release of neurotransmitters and neurohormones. Another theory suggests that acupuncture blocks the transmission of pain impulses from parts of the body to the central nervous system.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine “TCM”, the body is viewed as a balance of two opposing forces: *yin and yang*. Yin represents the cold, slow, or passive principle, while yang represents the hot, excited, or active principle.

TCM philosophy presupposes that health is achieved by maintaining the body in a "balanced state" and that disease is due to an internal imbalance of yin and yang. This imbalance leads to blockage in the flow of “Qi” (chi -or vital energy) and of blood along pathways known as meridians. TCM practitioners typically use herbs, acupuncture, and massage to help unblock Qi and blood flow in patients in an attempt to bring the body back into wellness.

The diagnostic tools differ from those of conventional medicine. The tools that the TCM doctor uses to analyze a patient’s condition are summarized below.

Pulse Diagnosis:

An intricate expert evaluation of the radial pulses reveals excesses, deficiencies, and disharmonies of Qi and designates which organs are involved.

Observation of the Patient:

Noting color and condition of the tongue, texture and condition of the skin, of the hair, and voice quality.

Patient Intake Interview:

Seeking a history of the illness, the patient’s emotional state, lifestyle, diet, all , which may contribute to Qi imbalance.

Physical Examination:

Feeling for tender acupoints related to specific areas and functions of the body, may relate to a specific problem and is a reliable diagnostic tool.

In TCM it is believed that the Qi circulates through all parts of the body along fourteen major energy channels, called meridians. Meridians make-up an intricate and invisible network transporting and directing Qi to every part of the body.

The Chinese accurately mapped the locations of the meridians, and now some 500 specific acupuncture points have been identified where Qi can be accessed and stimulated when there is an abnormality of flow.

An acupuncturist uses acupuncture needles to stimulate specific points along the meridians. In addition, heat from a moxa stick, or pressure via acupressure may be used to stimulate these points. This stimulation helps restore balance and the smooth flow of Qi to achieve harmony. This harmony allows the body to repair itself and maintain health.

Qi flows through the meridians in the body in a manner similar to, but not identical to the nervous system or circulatory system. When Qi flows smoothly and harmoniously throughout the meridians, every organ and bodily system in there is health and harmony, but when Qi is blocked or unbalanced there is pain and illness. The smooth and balanced flow of Qi can be affected by any noxious substance, both external and internal, including poor nutrition, impure food, toxic air or water, infectious or contagious diseases, malfunction of an organ, and traumatic or overuse injuries. Emotional responses to life such as worry, anxiety, stress may affect the flow. Any sustained blockage or other disruption of a smooth, balanced flow of Qi may lead to pain, ill health, or a weakened immune system.

Patient's Guide:

How do I use Chinese Medicine or Acupuncture?

Many Doctors of Chinese Medicine are in practice. It is always best to get a referral. Most acupuncture treatments consist of lying on a table for 30 – 60 minutes with needles inserted into your skin. This may be somewhat uncomfortable but should not be painful and when the patient gets acclimated, can be quite relaxing. Frequency of visits is anywhere from 3 times a week to a few times a year depending on the state of imbalance and the severity of the symptoms. Most likely, Chinese herbs will be prescribed as well at your visit.