

What is Acupuncture?

Intro.

Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine: Ancient Solutions to Modern Problems

While Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been around for well over 2000 years, it has only been recognized here in the United States in the last 30 years. It first gained notoriety in 1972 after President Nixon opened talks with China. A New York Times journalist named James Reston covering the event had a medical emergency and underwent an appendectomy with acupuncture being used as the only anesthetic.

By 2009, a growing population of people have or know someone who has been treated by acupuncture. What most people don't know, however, is the huge range of afflictions that acupuncture can treat. Aside from back and neck-pain, acupuncture is recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) to successfully treat a wide variety of illnesses including:

Asthma/Allergies: Chronic asthma, allergic rhinitis, sinus infections, sinus congestion.

Emotional Disorders: Stress, panic and anxiety attacks, depression, insomnia

Digestive Disorders: Heartburn, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic constipation/diarrhea.

Pre and Post Natal Care / Pregnancy: Infertility, labor-induction (shorten delivery time), reduce morning-sickness symptoms including nausea

Other: Dysmenorrhea, PMS, headaches, TMJ, tennis elbow, Bell's Palsy, sciatica, weight loss, drug addiction

Optimal Health: A Radical Concept

While it may be difficult to believe, the body **WANTS** to be healthy. Generally speaking, the human organism (or any living creature) is **designed** to thrive and function in an optimal state. Otherwise, we would not survive past perhaps a few years after birth. So, what prevents this? What leads us down the road towards health problems? In TCM, the classic explanation is that "disease results when we live in disharmony with nature". In modern terms, we interpret this by saying that poor health can be the result

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of excessive stress, poor diet, environmental toxins, lack of sleep, sedentary lifestyle, and over-work. All of these factors can lead to the imbalance preventing the body from thriving in its optimal state. Acupuncturists take this concept a step further by using needles to help restore this balance. We don't "cure" the patient. We simply nudge the body towards balance to allow it to heal itself.

How does it work?

Acupuncture relies on the theory that a "vital-force" or Qi flows through the body in a series of pathways called meridians. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), there are 12 primary and 8 secondary meridians. Disease occurs when the flow of Qi is blocked or deficient in one or more of these channels. Acupuncture needles are inserted in certain points along these channels to rectify the imbalance in this flow. A good acupuncturist will be able to interpret the symptoms, recognize the type of imbalance, and choose a combination from over 365 acupuncture points in the body to restore this balance.

"BUT I HATE NEEDLES!!"

One of the greatest challenges that I have to get patients into my clinic is their deep-rooted fear and distrust of needles; usually the result of some traumatic childhood trauma at the doctor's office.

While acupuncture needles vary in size, most are far smaller than the average hypodermic needles. During many treatments, patients don't even realize that the needles have been inserted. At most, the patients feel a mild tingling around the area of needle insertion and are genuinely surprised how painless the treatment is. Even children no longer dread coming to the clinic once their initial fears are allayed.

Technology vs. Tradition

In a time of astounding technological achievements and advancements in science, how is it that such a simple tool can be used to successfully treat such a wide variety of health problems? Surely with the millions of dollars spent on the research and marketing of new drugs each year, acupuncture should be discarded in favor of modern medicine. Shouldn't it?

While there is a proper time and place for modern pharmaceuticals, many of the drugs used to treat common health problems rely on relieving symptoms rather than improving health. In order to achieve this, some physiological response must be compromised, often leading to several undesirable and possibly dangerous side-effects.

Let's examine two health problems heavily marketed by drug companies on TV: Asthma/Allergies and Insomnia. Both of these problems are extremely common and coincidentally are very successfully treated by acupuncture.

Shown below are the side-effects listed (from their website) for a common allergy medication to treat allergic rhinitis:

“ - occurring at a frequency greater than or equal to 1% and at an incidence greater than placebo, regardless of causality assessment, were *sinusitis, upper respiratory infection, sinus headache, cough, epistaxis, headache, otitis media, pharyngitis, and increased ALT.* “ - (www.singulair.com)

The side-effects listed for a common sleep-aid as shown on the popular website: www.rxlist.com. These side-effects were listed in a clinical trial and shown to occur in greater frequency than a placebo:

“ Headache, depression, dizziness, hallucinations, libido decreased, nervousness, somnolence, respiratory system infection, skin rash, unpleasant taste, gynecomastia, dysmenorrhea”*

In contrast, the long-term side-effects of acupuncture, regardless of the details of treatment, may include a *mild euphoria, relaxation, improved sleep, and an enhanced immune system.*

So, which approach would you choose?

There is hope!

Fortunately, many health insurance companies have recently discovered that acupuncture is actually less expensive than surgeries and pharmaceutical drugs for many of today's modern health problems. More importantly, they recognize the vast amount of data proving acupuncture as a very real and powerful healing modality. As a result, several health insurance companies will now reimburse patients for acupuncture treatments.

Acupuncture is growing. Even medical doctors and chiropractors have tried to exploit the popularity by establishing fast-track courses allowing them to use acupuncture needles.

So before you reach into the medicine cabinet to deal with chronic allergies, or request another cortisone shot for your knee, discuss the problem with your local acupuncturist. It may be the better (and safer) choice.