



# Ancient Chinese Secret, Huh?

## The surreptitious benefits of acupuncture are exposed

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You may think of acupuncture as a new type of alternative medicine, however, it's one of the oldest types of medicine in the world, originating from China approximately 5,000 years ago. Acupuncture is the use of fine needles inserted on the body's surface to influence physiological functioning of the body. This practice is based on a comprehensive system of creating balance in the body. Whether you work 85 hours a week and don't have enough down time or you live a couch potato lifestyle, we all feel the effect of imbalance in our lives. This imbalance can lead to health problems.

Acupuncture is intended to create balance in the body so an illness has no place to reside. This is achieved by balancing qi (pronounced chee). Qi moves through meridians, which run throughout the body like a network of rivers. These meridians, or pathways, are linked to specific organs and organ systems. A meridian that is obstructed, deficient, excessive, or just out of balance leads to illness. Imagine a large boulder blocking the flow of water and creating shallow waters on one side, and deep overflowing water on the other. There are thousands of acupuncture points along the meridians, which can be stimulated to enhance and balance the flow of qi to restore health.

## How Does it Work?

Acupuncturists and doctors in China have used this healing art for centuries yet, we still can't completely explain all the effects of acupuncture from a Western medical perspective. There are currently many ongoing studies testing the validity and effects of acupuncture.

Previous research has shown acupuncture may alter brain chemistry by releasing neurotransmitters and neurohormones, which have a positive effect on parts of the central nervous system and possibly the immune system, blood flow, and the regulation of blood pressure and body temperature. In addition, scientists have discovered acupuncture may release several types of opioids and endorphins, which are pain-killing chemicals.

## What Conditions are Helped by Acupuncture?

The National Institute of Health (NIH) has researched acupuncture and its effect in treating specific diseases. In 1997, the NIH reported that acupuncture is an effective treatment for nausea caused by surgical anesthesia and cancer chemotherapy, as well as, pain due to post-surgical dental work. The NIH also reported that acupuncture by itself or combined with conventional therapies is useful to treat addiction, headaches, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, lower back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, asthma, and to assist in stroke rehabilitation. Traditional Chinese acupuncturists use acupuncture to treat many other health problems as well.

## Does it hurt?

Acupuncture needles are solid, metallic, and very thin, not like those used to draw blood or give a shot at the doctor's office. A slight pricking sensation is felt when the needle is first inserted, but there is no pain after that. Sometimes, an aching or warm sensation is felt when the needle has already been inserted, but this sensation quickly fades and is not painful, just odd to the novice.

## Needle Safety

Most acupuncturists use pre-sterilized disposable needles to prevent infection. Needles are used once and discarded according to medical biohazard regulations and guidelines to prevent the spread of blood borne diseases such as Hepatitis and AIDS. If you have concerns, ask your acupuncturist or doctor if they use pre-sterilized disposable needles and ask to see them if you still need assurance.

### **Who is licensed to perform acupuncture?**

This can vary from state to state. Licensed Acupuncturists, using the title, L.Ac., are specifically trained in acupuncture. Other practitioners who may be licensed to use acupuncture may include the following: medical doctor (MD), osteopathic doctor (DO), naturopathic doctor (ND or NMD), or chiropractor (DC). A good rule of thumb is to get a referral to a practitioner from someone you trust.

### **What to Expect During The First Treatment**

The practitioner will ask questions regarding your health history, digestion, emotions, sleep patterns, and appetite. These are all standard questions and help the skilled practitioner assess your overall health status.

They may look at the complexion of your face, examine your tongue, and feel your pulse. In Chinese medicine, the tongue gives information vital to assessing health. In addition, six radial pulses are felt, three on each wrist, which give information about the qi flowing through the different meridians. All of this information is used to create the perfect treatment individualized and specific to you. The number of needles used and the length of your treatment may vary depending on the condition being treated, your current state of health, and the treatment approach. You may feel energized or very relaxed during and after your treatment, so don't be surprised if you feel better and want to come back for more.