



ACUPUNCTURE

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is the use of thin metallic needles to stimulate anatomical points on the body. Although acupuncture is considered a “new” alternative medicine in the Western world, acupuncture is a practiced medical treatment that is over 5,000 years old. Acupuncture has been practiced on both humans and animals for thousands of years in China. Acupuncture is one of the five key components of the system of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The other components include food therapy, tui-na (Chinese body work and massage), herbal medicine, and qi-gong. In Chinese medicine, the body is seen as a delicate balance of opposing and connected forces: yin and yang. Yin is signified by female attributes, passive, dark, cold, and moist. Yang is signified by male attributes, light, active, warm, and dry. Among the major assumptions in Chinese medicine is that health is achieved by maintaining the body in a balanced state and that disease is due to imbalance of yin and yang. Acupuncture and the other TCM components act to restore balance.

How does acupuncture work?

Modern research has documented that acupoints occur in areas of the body where there is a high density of free nerve endings, mast cells, small arterioles, and lymphatic vessels. Stimulation of acupoints results in several physiologic effects on the body including release of neurotransmitters such as beta-endorphins and serotonin, regulation of gastrointestinal motility, anti-inflammatory effect, immunoregulation, hormone and reproductive regulation, and anti-fever effect.

What medical conditions can acupuncture help?

Clinical trials indicate that acupuncture may be effective for the following conditions:

- Musculoskeletal disorders: muscle soreness, back pain, osteoarthritis, degenerative joint disease secondary to hip and elbow dysplasia.
- Neurological disorders: seizures, laryngeal hemiplegia, disc disease, facial and radial nerve paralysis.
- Gastrointestinal disorders: diarrhea, gastric ulcers, colic, vomiting, constipation, and impaction
- Other chronic conditions: cancer, asthma, cough, uveitis, behavioral problems, Cushing’s disease, thyroid disease, infertility, kidney disease/failure, geriatric weakness, skin problems
- Performance enhancement and prevention of disease

Acupuncture is CAUTIONED or CONTRAINDICATED in the following conditions:

- Fracture, pregnancy, open wound, infectious disease



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Is acupuncture useful in the treatment of cancer?

Acupuncture may be beneficial in the care of the cancer patient and may be used in combination with conventional cancer therapies such as surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. Acupuncture may be helpful in reducing cancer pain; alleviating side effects from conventional therapies, including nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy; and enhancing immune system function.

How is acupuncture administered?

Most patients will receive 10-20 needles per treatment. There are 3 “types” of acupuncture: dry needle, aqua, and electro acupuncture. Dry needle acupuncture involves use of needles only. With aqua-acupuncture a substance, typically vitamin B12, is injected at the acupoint. This allows for longer lasting effect of the acupuncture treatment. Aquaacupuncture is also useful for patients that will not hold still long enough for traditional dry needling. Electro-acupuncture involves the use of very small electrical impulses through the acupuncture needles. This technique is generally used for pain relief and neurological conditions. Heat may also be applied to acupuncture points through the burning of specific herbs; this is called Moxibustion. Acupuncture and Moxibustion are considered complimentary forms of therapy and are commonly used together. Moxibustion is used for ailments such as bronchial asthma, bronchitis, certain types of paralysis, and arthritic disorders.

How long does each treatment last?

Each acupuncture session may last from 15-30 minutes.

How many treatments are needed?

The number of treatments needed will depend on the nature, severity, and duration of the illness. Acute conditions may require only a single treatment. A series of 3-10 treatments can resolve many chronic problems. Although in many patients, improvement may be seen after a single treatment, occasional patients (< 10%) may have worsening of their condition before improvement is noted. In degenerative conditions and geriatric patients, monthly treatments may be needed over a period of time. For most conditions, treatments are initially administered weekly and the frequency of treatment is gradually increased. For cancer patients, acupuncture is often administered every 4-6 weeks. Acupuncture may be administered more frequently in the cancer patient if being used for pain relief or to help alleviate side effects of therapy.