

# **Is Acupuncture Right for Me??**

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Maybe you have heard of acupuncture or you know someone who has tried it, and you wonder...could I benefit from acupuncture?? Do you have some concerns, or think that acupuncture won't help whatever it is that ails you? Or perhaps you have no particular reason for not trying acupuncture and are just in need of a little educational boost to get you excited about what it can do for you!

## **Will acupuncture hurt?**

Some people are unsettled by the idea of getting acupuncture because they don't like needles. Acupuncturists are frequently asked whether or not a treatment is painful. First, the needles are extremely thin and second, they are not hollow, like the needles that are used for injections. This means that the tissue is not being torn in the same way as when a nurse gives you a shot. This does not mean that acupuncture is free of sensation, but it does mean that you are not going to have the experience of getting 10-15 injections...ouch! Most people find acupuncture to be relaxing and enjoyable. Since everyone has different levels of sensitivity, your acupuncturist will work closely with you to ensure your experience is positive.

For those of you who say 'there is no way someone is going to stick a needle in me', traditional Chinese medicine is more than just acupuncture. Other modalities include acupressure, tuina (Chinese medical massage), cupping, guasha, dietary therapy, herbal medicine, moxibustion and qigong. So rest assured, that while you may actually discover that you are comfortable getting acupuncture, there is an entire tool kit that your acupuncturist can pull from to work towards your wellness goals that does not involve needles.

## **What Can Acupuncture Treat?**

According to an official report by the World Health Organization (Acupuncture: Review and Analysis of Reports on Controlled Clinical Trials), several conditions have been shown to be effectively treated by acupuncture. The list is extensive and includes: pain (back, neck, elbow, knee, shoulder, facial, dental, sciatic and post-operative) sprains, headache, TMJ, rheumatoid arthritis, induction of labor, correction of malposition of fetus, morning sickness, nausea and vomiting, stroke, hypertension, adverse reactions to radiation or chemotherapy, allergic rhinitis, depression, dysmenorrhea, peptic ulcer, gastritis, and the list goes on. The WHO report includes multiple other conditions with varying levels of clinical success. Acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine offer a complete system of care, so whatever your health concern is...consider acupuncture! This article will explore a few of the more common conditions seen in an acupuncture clinic.

## **Musculoskeletal Pain**

The number one reason people go to an acupuncturist is for musculoskeletal pain. Those of you who are suffering with a painful condition know that commonly prescribed treatments include daily pills, powerful medications which have the potential to be addictive, or invasive surgical procedures. Acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine provide a safe and effective choice for treating pain. According to acupuncture theory, pain is due to a blockage or restriction in the body. Acupuncture helps by releasing bound tension in the fascia to aid in alleviating musculoskeletal pain. It also increases blood flow which facilitates the natural healing capabilities of the body. Acupuncture works well for chronic pain in the same ways, and helps to reprogram the neurological responses that develop when pain has been present for a long duration of time. Living with pain is something that millions of Americans have come to accept, but acupuncture can improve your quality of life by reducing or eliminating your painful condition.

## **Digestive Health**

Digestive distress is extremely common and potentially very disruptive; the digestive system is the center of your body, providing warning signs when something is not right. Bloating, acid reflux, fatigue, nausea, constipation, diarrhea, emotional health, and mental clarity can all be treated via the digestive system. Your gut transforms the fuel from food and transports it to all tissues, enabling the body to function. Your acupuncturist will work with you to help rebalance your ‘middle burner’ by incorporating dietary choices that are appropriate both for your body and for the season. Stress and emotions are also commonly reflected in our digestive system...as the saying goes, if you have a gut feeling! Digestive health is approached from all angles to help you find relief from your symptoms.

## **Difficulty Sleeping**

Quality sleep is essential to every aspect of our lives. We need time to regenerate, recuperate and recharge. Lacking adequate sleep, getting too much sleep, or having inconsistent sleep patterns deprives the body of valuable time to hit the reset button. Those of you who suffer from sleep trouble know the havoc that this can inflict on your day, both physically and mentally. Do you lay in bed thinking or worrying, or maybe you toss and turn, wake up drenched in sweat, or wake at the same time every night unable to fall back asleep? Acupuncture can help you create healthy sleep patterns by correcting the cause of your sleep troubles. Acupuncture, among other mechanisms of action, helps regulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which is the part of your body that promotes ‘rest and digest’. In Chinese medicine, your treatment is tailored to address your unique pattern, helping you gain freedom from the repercussions of poor sleep without the use of sedating medications!

## **Smoking and Addiction Recovery**

The NADA (National Acupuncture Detoxification Association) protocol is a specific treatment being used nationally to aid in addiction recovery, smoking cessation, stress and PTSD. This system uses five specific points in the ear and has been shown to be very effective in helping people overcome addiction. Step one in recovery is active and willing participation by you! When you are ready, the NADA protocol, often used with a whole body treatment, may be the extra boost that your body, mind and spirit need to kick the habit.

## **Inflammatory Conditions**

Inflammation is said to be the root of all disease. But inflammation in of itself is not all bad. It is actually very helpful in the healing process, when it is functioning properly. When injured, the body produces inflammation which increases the flow of blood and delivers natural healing components to fix whatever has gone wrong. This is why in Chinese medicine a patient is never advised to put ice on an injury such as a sprained ankle! Ice decreases inflammation, which inhibits the helper cells ability to get their job done. Instead, your acupuncturist will use an herbal poultice that helps the injury heal synergistically with the body's innate function. The problem is when inflammation becomes over active or chronic, which causes your body to be on high alert all the time, leading to a host of other health concerns. Depending on what the inflammatory condition is (asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis, trauma, etc.), your treatment will vary. Acupuncture, herbal medicine and dietary therapy work well together to address inflammatory conditions. Some inflammatory conditions can be debilitating; any relief can provide life changing improvements.

## **Stroke Recovery**

A stroke has the potential to drastically alter a person's quality of life, to say the least. There are entire medical facilities in China dedicated to the use of acupuncture for stroke rehabilitation. Scalp acupuncture provides a complete system of care to treat people with symptoms including limited mobility, difficulty speaking, tremors and lack of balance. As with any condition, each individual responds differently to acupuncture, and levels of improvement can be unpredictable. Even with the most severe of stroke symptoms, acupuncturists have witnessed patients experience substantial recovery.

## **Headaches and Migraines**

Have you ever been afflicted with a debilitating migraine...or maybe you have that nagging headache that just won't go away, perhaps something in between. Whatever your head pain, you know that your day would be so much better without it! Traditional Chinese medicine will look to the cause of your head pain in an effort to eliminate or minimize their future return. Headaches can be due to a number of triggers including diet, posture, light, and trauma. Your acupuncturist will work with you to determine where your headaches are coming from and will help balance

your body to clear any blockages that may be the physiological cause of your pain. With severe and sudden onset of pain (known as a thunderclap headache), it is recommended to seek emergency medical care to rule out a more serious cause. Your acupuncturist is always there, working with you in an effort to help you find pain free living.

## **Fatigue**

A major sales market today is aimed towards increasing energy levels, often instilling fear that you have the condition they are describing and need their product. Millions of Americans are simply feeling worn out! When treating fatigue, Chinese medicine looks to both external and internal causes. Externally, we live in a culture where we are expected to be on all the time. Whether you work full time, raise kids, go to school...whatever it is in your life, you may not be giving your body adequate time to recuperate. On the other end of the spectrum, fatigue can also be due to inactivity. Lethargy generates lethargy. The body needs exercise, which is often a productive way to improve your energy level. Among other things low energy can be influenced by hormonal imbalances, diet, or immune system responses. Your acupuncturist can advise appropriate food choices, encourage adequate rest to exercise ratios and help you work towards correcting an internal imbalance; improving energy levels from the inside out!

## **Stress and Anxiety**

Stress and anxiety are both inherent functions of the body that warn us of dangers. Once upon a time, this was helpful to successfully escape potential predators, such as a saber tooth tiger! They are still beneficial today to motivate or protect us at times. But being under consistent stress or anxiety is not useful and can be very harmful to the body. The fight or flight hormones are only intended to be released when necessary. Acupuncture works to balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems and promote a healthy response to mental, emotional and physical stimulus. Emotional health is a key element in Chinese medicine. Acupuncture treats the entire person, it does not separate body, mind and spirit which makes it extremely effective for decreasing stress levels and regulating anxieties. Even if you are receiving acupuncture for something else, you may notice these beneficial effects. Many people find an acupuncture session to be a high point in their week because it creates both the time and space to release all forms of tension.

## **Preventative Care and Wellness Maintenance**

So you feel pretty healthy overall and you are not sure if you need acupuncture. Chinese medicine is actually intended to be used for wellness maintenance and preventative care, so even if you don't have a "chief complaint," acupuncture is still right for you! Coming in for a wellness visit can keep your body in balance, strengthen your ability to ward off sickness and keep you feeling happy and healthy.

## **What You Should Know**

Acupuncture treats both the root and the branch of an illness. What this means is that while your acupuncture treatment is helping alleviate symptoms, it is also working on a deeper level to treat what is causing those symptoms in the first place. Acupuncture works as a series of treatments; it does not make all of your problems magically vanish after one visit. Your acupuncturist will create a treatment plan that meets your specific needs and wellness goals. In general, in the beginning, you will come for a visit 1-2 times per week. As you improve, your treatments will be spaced further and further apart. Most people will see an improvement in their symptoms after a couple of visits. A series of treatments ranges from 6-12 visits. The objective is to teach your body how to be healthy and to correct any deeper imbalances. Once you have reached your wellness goal, then it is a great idea to use Chinese medicine as preventative care and health maintenance. Your acupuncturist wants to help you feel restored, not keep you on the treatment table. This is the business of health, not the perpetuation of illness. It is said that a good acupuncturist has no patients because all of them are better!

## **The Future of Holistic Health Care**

Acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine are being integrated into hospitals all over the country. More and more chiropractors, MDs and biomedical centers are requesting that acupuncturists join their medical facilities. This is because acupuncture works. Acupuncture works by increasing the body's own healing capacity. For example, our bodies are able to clot blood when we are bleeding, knit bones together when broken and activate hormonal and neurological responses as called upon. These are some of the amazing and fantastically creative functions of life! In Chinese medicine, the aim is to restore the function of the body to its optimum state of health. This is done by treating the entire person. Health care providers who want their patients to obtain maximum benefits know that adding acupuncture services will do just that. This is because acupuncture functions synergistically with other healing modalities which can shorten healing time and increase effectiveness. Chinese medicine also works well alone, offering a complete system of care. In a modern medical world, taking the best of what has been practiced for thousands of years in Chinese medicine and combining it with the scientific discoveries in the biomedical model optimally benefits you, the patient. This is the essence of the integrative medical model and this is the future of holistic health care.

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