

ANCIENT PRACTICE OF ACUPUNCTURE OFFERS ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT FOR HOST OF AILMENTS

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It is likely you have heard of **acupuncture** but want to know more about who **can** benefit from it and how it works.

Acupuncture, a branch of Asian medicine, was developed in China more than 2,500 years ago and later adopted by practitioners in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam and in the 20th century by Western acupuncturists. Asian medicine is based on a theory that attributes health to the condition of a person's **Qi** (pronounced chee). **Qi** is usually translated into English as energy or life force, thought to circulate through the body via a system of 14 channels, or meridians. These channels form an energetic network that joins together all of the body's organs.

Acupuncturists insert thin flexible needles at points along the channels where the **Qi** is most accessible. The needles are intended to either strengthen the **Qi** or to remove the impediments to its flow.

What to expect

Acupuncturists will discuss your symptoms and Western diagnoses and ask you questions to determine an Asian medical diagnosis. An **acupuncture** is based on a holistic understanding of the individual patient; some of these questions may seem unrelated to the condition that you have but are asked to enable the acupuncturist to better understand your overall condition.

An acupuncturist will probably also look at your tongue and take your pulse to **help** with diagnosis. These are techniques that have been developed over the centuries to understand the energetic condition of the internal organs. For example, there are three positions to take the pulse on each wrist. The acupuncturist will examine the relative strengths of the pulse at each position and distinguish between more than 20 pulse qualities. Many acupuncturists also use abdominal palpation as a diagnostic tool.

A treatment plan will be implemented once a diagnosis has been made. Thin needles about three times the thickness of human hair will be placed, usually for 10 to 20 minutes, into the points needed to treat the patient's condition. These needles enter the skin with little resistance.

People experience different sensations from **acupuncture**. Some describe the feeling as tingling, warm, heavy, or numbing at the site of the needle. Most people find the sessions relaxing, and some even fall asleep during the treatment.

For certain conditions, an acupuncturist may use additional treatment techniques. These include warming the points with a moxa, an herbal substance derived from the mugwort plant.

Therapeutic results

Some patients notice rapid improvement after just a few sessions. In other cases, conditions that have taken years to develop take longer to treat. Occasionally, symptoms may worsen for a day or two before they begin to improve. This is cause for alarm but often is a natural part of the healing process.

Acupuncture has many possible uses. In November 1997, a National Institutes of Health advisory panel concluded that **acupuncture** is an effective treatment for post-operative pain and nausea associated with pregnancy or chemotherapy.

In the same report, the World Health Organization was cited, stating that **acupuncture** may **help** people with digestive disorders, neurological problems like headache and facial pain, gynecological conditions like menopause and premenstrual syndrome, respiratory disorders like asthma and allergies, and many musculoskeletal problems.

Many people also use **acupuncture** as part of a wellness program to reduce stress and increase overall health and vitality.

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