

## What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a therapeutic method used to encourage natural healing, reduce or relieve pain and improve function of affected areas of the body. Acupuncture is safe and effective and is often successfully used as an

alternative to medications or even surgery. Relief is often obtained when traditional medical therapy has failed.

Acupuncture involves the insertion of very fine needles through the skin and tissues at specific points on the body. There is no injection of any substance and the treatment itself causes minimal discomfort.

"Classical" acupuncture was developed in China as a system of diagnosing and treating pain and disease. It defines acupuncture as one component of Traditional Chinese Medicine which aims to balance energy and blood in the body in order to keep it functional and healthy. Although proven successful for hundreds of years without the benefit of modern medical knowledge, it is only in recent years that the scientific and medical communities of Europe and North America have begun to study acupuncture to understand and explain its effectiveness. "Anatomical" acupuncture refers to a more modern approach taken today by the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada Institute (AFCI) and other western trained acupuncture therapists. When combined with a knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathophysiology, modern therapists can use acupuncture effectively.

Modern technology has allowed variations in acupuncture treatment. Electro-acupuncture involves stimulation of inserted needles with gentle electrical impulses. Rubber electrodes or moistened cotton-tipped applicators can also be used to deliver electrical stimulation to acupuncture points (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation or T.E.N.S.). Low power laser may also be used instead of needles to stimulate appropriate points.

## How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture stimulates the body to produce its own pain relieving chemicals called "endorphins". These chemicals mimic morphine by attaching to opiate receptor sites found throughout the nervous system. Endorphins help to block pathways that relay pain messages from the body to the brain, resulting in relief of pain, general relaxation and biochemical restoration of the body's own internal regulation systems.

The improved energy and biochemical balance produced by acupuncture stimulates the body's natural healing abilities, reducing inflammation, and promoting physical and emotional well-being.

## How is acupuncture used today?

Acupuncture is very effective in treating a variety of painful disorders, both acute and chronic.

The World Health Organization has identified the benefits of acupuncture in the treatment of a wide range of medical problems including:

- Digestive disorders: gastritis, hyperacidity, spastic bowel, constipation, diarrhea
- Respiratory disorders: sinusitis, bronchitis, asthma
- Neurological and muscular disorders: headaches, neck and back pain, neuralgia, frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, tendinitis, sciatica, arthritis
- Urinary, menstrual and reproductive disorders
- Addiction, insomnia

In treating any illness or affliction, a correct diagnosis is important before any decisions are made regarding therapy. Once the diagnosis is established, a qualified practitioner can advise whether acupuncture is appropriate.

## Are there any adverse effects or risks to the treatment?

One of the most striking aspects of acupuncture is the almost complete absence of adverse effects and complications from its use. Most patients find that the treatments are relaxing and cause minimal discomfort.

People with pacemakers should avoid electrical stimulation unless approved by their cardiologist. Women in early pregnancy and haemophiliacs should be treated with caution.

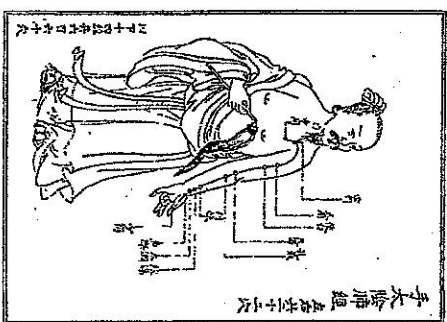
The AFCI recommends that only sterile disposable needles be used, preventing any risk of infection. In particular, there is no possibility of transmission of the AIDS or hepatitis viruses when sterile disposable needles are used.

## Does it hurt?

People experience differing sensations with acupuncture. Most patients feel

only minimal discomfort as the needles are inserted: some feel no pain at all. Once the needles are in place, there should be no significant discomfort.

Acupuncture needles are extremely fine and are made from stainless steel. Two or three acupuncture needles would fit inside the barrel of a regular hollow needle used for injections.



## How many treatments will be required?

The number of treatments will vary with each individual and the condition being treated. For acute problems, only a few treatments may be required. In some cases, one treatment will be sufficient.

For complex or longstanding conditions, one or two treatments a week for several weeks may be recommended with less frequent treatment as improvement occurs. Treatment sessions usually last between 15 and 30 minutes. Relief may be immediate or occur within a few hours, or after a few days.

