

Lisa LaCova-Bhat

Traditional Chinese medicine, originated in ancient China, is part of the complementary and alternative medicine includes: Acupuncture, herbal remedies, moxibustion, cupping, tuina, guisha, qi Kung, nutrition and other therapeutic modalities. It is rooted in the ancient philosophy of Taoism that dates back more than 5,000 years ago. Today, TCM is practiced side by side with Western medicine in many of China's hospitals and clinics and also used in the US.

### What is Acupuncture? How does it work?

Acupuncture is Chinese Medicine, preventive medicine to help the body naturally heal itself and the life energy flowing throughout the body, which is called Qi or Chi, is generated in the internal organs and pathways. Qi regulates a person's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical balance and to be influenced by the opposing forces of Yin and Yang. The health of a person is influenced by the quality, quantity and balance of Qi. Disease is proposed to result from the flow of Qi being disrupted and Yin and Yang becoming imbalanced. Qi circulates through specific pathways called meridians or channels. There are 14 main meridian pathways throughout the body. Each is connected to specific organs. Meridian pathways transport Vital Energy or Qi to nourish and energize every cell, organ, gland, tissue, and muscle. Any obstruction of Qi anywhere in the body will hinder the distribution of nourishment that the body needs to function optimally.

The energy combines with the breath that circulates throughout the body forming pathways called meridians. The 14 meridians total in the body form complex networks that connect to all the major organs, and bodily functions. According to Chinese medical theory, illness arises when the cyclical flow of qi in the meridians becomes unbalanced or blocked.

Acupuncture is the stimulation of specific points located near or on the surface of the skin which have the ability to alter various biochemical and physiological conditions in order to achieve the desired effect. Acupuncture involves the insertion of extremely thin

needles into your skin by stimulating specific points along these meridians; acupuncture practitioners believe that your energy flow will re-balance. In Traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture is most commonly used to treat pain. The most common uses are for chronic pain conditions like arthritis, lower back pain and headaches, as well as fatigue, anxiety and digestive problems.

#### Explanation of How Acupuncture Works:

It is a very safe procedure that inserts thin sterile needles on the body in specific areas, over 365 different points used to help prevent disease, balance the body and restore health.

Acupuncture is all based on energy or “qi” when it is balance; the flow of energy is distributed throughout the organs and the whole body.

It is imperative the patient is relaxed and does not move during the treatment. The insertion of the needles sometimes feel a prick or pinch that is normal there should be no pain, or discomfort. Initially, the patient will feel a heavy sensation, either throbbing or pulsing or intense sensation. If the patient feels any pain after the needles are in, the practitioner should adjust the needles or re needle the point. The patient will relax and rest for 20-30 minutes until the treatment is completed.

Acupuncture points are areas of designated electrical sensitivity. Inserting needles at these points stimulates various sensory receptors that, in turn, stimulate nerves that transmit impulses to the hypothalamic-pituitary system at the base of the brain.

The hypothalamus-pituitary glands are responsible for releasing neurotransmitters and endorphins, the body's natural pain-killing hormones. It is estimated that endorphins are 200 times more potent than morphine. Endorphins play a big role in the functioning of the hormonal system. This is why acupuncture works well for back pain and arthritis and also for P.M.S. and infertility. The substances released as a result of acupuncture not only relax the whole body; they regulate serotonin in the brain, which plays a role in human

and animal disposition. A release of endorphins would help explain how acupuncture treats pain and also the extremely relaxed feeling most people have after an acupuncture treatment, this is why depression is often treated with acupuncture. Some of the physiological effects observed throughout the body include increased blood circulation, decreased inflammation, relief from pain, relief of muscle spasms and increased T-cell count that stimulates the immune system.

Neuroimaging studies show that it seems to calm areas of the brain that register pain and activate those involved in rest and recuperation. Doppler ultrasound shows that acupuncture increases blood flow in treated areas. Scientists are also finding parallels between the ancient concepts and modern anatomy. Many of the 365 plus acupuncture points correspond to nerve bundles or muscle trigger points. Several meridians track major arteries and nerves. For instance, if one has a heart attack, the pain will radiate up across the chest and down the left arm, which is where the heart meridian goes in that exact direction. The “Gate Control” theory of pain, that is presented by Patrick Wall and Ronald Melzack in 1965, states that pain is a function of the balance between messages in the central nervous system, brain and spinal cord and the peripheral nervous system, branching nerves within the body. The theory is how many messages the body can carry and listen and respond to at one time. By stimulating the large nerve fibers, you can essentially block the bodies’ ability to experience “pain” and reduce inflammation. Acupuncture helps stress and calm the person temporarily, but also protecting the person from damage from stress over extended periods of time. It has a reducing effect on inflammation locally and throughout the body. Modern research has shown detrimental effects of chronic systemic inflammation such as: fibromyalgia, Parkinson’s, heart disease, diabetes, etc.) and acupuncture's ability to treat these conditions must in some way be related to offsetting these systemic responses.

On a global level, acupuncture continues to grow and thrive around the world, Even so, the use of acupuncture continues to spread, often alongside conventional medicine. U.S. Navy, Air Force and Army doctors are using acupuncture to treat musculoskeletal problems, pain and stress in stateside hospitals and combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan. Delegations from Acupuncturists Without Borders are holding communal ear-needling sessions to reduce stress among earthquake victims in Haiti.

There are Major medical centers that use acupuncture to counteract the side effects of chemotherapy. In a 2007 survey, 3.2 million Americans had undergone acupuncture in the past year that was up from 2.1 million in 2001, according to the government's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

Acupuncture was created by Taoists who influenced the Chinese culture and spiritual beliefs of China through science and medicine. Taoists discovered the “qi”, energy source that sustains the source of life, evolve to the oneness, that developed into the Yin and yang theory of two opposing forces, complementary to each other to shape all of life. Qi is a powerful life force that creates homeostasis maintains and restores health for the body. The Taoists were able to discover qi moves through specific pathways in the body to the organs. For instance, when the stomach processes food it uses qi. The pathway of qi for the stomach channel begins from face, chest, spleen, pancreas abdomen groin, leg and foot. They were able to measure the qi of the body and organs by measurement of the radial artery of the wrist, by the beats and strength quality and shape, of the pulse. Before determining which meridians may be blocked and where to place the needles, acupuncturists traditionally used four methods to evaluate a patient’s condition: observing the spirit of the face and body/examining the tongue, hearing/smelling, asking/interviewing questions about digestion, sleep and other habits and touching/palpating the pulse. TCM uses individualized treatment based on each case. TCM uses the eight principles to analyze symptoms and conditions cold/hot, interior/exterior, excess/deficiency, and yin/yang. It also uses the theory of five elements to help harmonize the body: fire, earth, metal, water and wood, these elements correspond to the organs and tissues in the body. The 14 meridians are thought to be based on the rivers of China, and the 365 points may represent the days of the year.

Resource:

[nccam.nih.gov/health/whatiscam/chinesemed.htm](http://nccam.nih.gov/health/whatiscam/chinesemed.htm)