

A Quick-Start guide to Acupuncture

Using needles to adjust bodily functions to optimum levels is the principle behind acupuncture. Both ancient Chinese and modern Western practitioners have used this technique to relieve many sufferers of chronic disease. Needling is a relatively safe, beneficial treatment strategy that can be used to reduce pain, improve healing, and increase general well-being. But exactly how is this procedure done and what sort of benefits can be obtained?

Procedure for Needle Puncture

There are two broad categories of acupuncture practice today, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and medical acupuncture. Both have their merits, so the choice is individual. The decision for most people hinges upon which philosophy appeals more to them and which technique holds the least apprehension.

In TCM, practitioners adhere to the concept of Qi, or energy flow, and the meridians in which they travel. They use longer needles and insert them deeper in order to reach the acupuncture points. Modern science has found little evidence to prove the existence of these energy channels, but this is the technique that has been used effectively for thousands of years.

In medical acupuncture, the practitioners are graduates of western medical schools. Their application of needles is not based on the traditional acupuncture points, but on anatomic data. These acupuncturists use shorter needles and the insertions are shallower. They also tend to use fewer needles and leave them inserted for shorter periods of time. Adherents to TCM feel this is a watered-down version of the real thing. Nevertheless, many patients have felt relief of symptoms through this method.

Conditions for Puncture Application

There is a broad and extensive list of ailments which can be treated with acupuncture. The conditions run the gamut from asthma to constipation, anxiety to weight loss. Most TCM practitioners believe that any health condition results from an imbalance in Qi flow, therefore amenable to needle therapy. Western acupuncturists tend to have a more limited list of indications, the most common of which is undoubtedly control of pain.

Control of pain is the most well researched of all of the indications for acupuncture. There is a definite beneficial effect for a majority of patients using this method. Migraines, premenstrual syndrome, arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and neuralgias are but a few examples. The theory behind its

effectiveness is also medically accepted and well researched, called the gate-control theory of pain. It states that the needles can stimulate nerves so that they block the impulses from pain triggers.

Expected Puncture Session Result

It is important to emphasize that acupuncture is used only on top of existing medical therapy. At no time should a patient discontinue medication or ignore medical instructions in favor of needle puncture. After undergoing a needle puncture regimen, the primary care physician can make an evaluation with regards to decreasing dependence on other therapies.

A course of acupuncture therapy will last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months. This depends upon the complexity of the particular medical condition. Results also vary, so it is important to have a frank discussion with the acupuncturist regarding expected results and their time frame. In general, the patient will begin to feel beneficial effects after three or four session. Certain specific conditions will actually get a little worse before improving so keeping informed is key.

In modern medicine, the use of traditional techniques with proven results has become a widely accepted practice. Acupuncture has proven its worth time and again. Modern practice guidelines make it effective, reproducible, and safe. It is a gift of healing from ancient sages that has the potential to bring relief to millions of people.