

Acupuncture Can Help Ease Pain

By Elizabeth Chen Christenson, MD, LAc.

Q. What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture originated in China as far back as 5,000 years ago. It is a method of influencing body function and promoting natural healing and pain relief by inserting solid, hair-thin filiform needles into very precise points on the body. It began to become better known in the United States in 1971, when New York Times reporter James Reston wrote about how doctors in China used acupuncture needles for his post-op pain management after an emergency appendectomy.

Q. How does acupuncture work?

In traditional Chinese medicine, the body is seen as a delicate balance of two opposing and inseparable complementary forces — yin (陰) and yang (陽) — and disease is caused by an imbalance leading to a blockage in the flow of qi (life-force energy, or "chi", 氣). A major concept in acupuncture is that health can be achieved by balancing yin and yang the opposing forces that influence qi, which purportedly regulates a person's spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health. It is believed that yin and yang run along 12 main meridians and eight secondary meridians, and there are more than 2,000 acupuncture points on the human body that connect with them. Needling these points can unblock the obstructions of the meridians and re-establish the energy flow through the meridians.

From a modern neurophysiological perspective, it is proposed that acupuncture produces its effects through regulating the nervous system, thus aiding the activity of pain-killing biochemicals such as endorphins, and regulating immune-system cells at specific sites in the body. In addition, studies have shown that acupuncture may alter brain chemistry by changing the release of neurotransmitters and neurohormones, thus affecting the parts of the central nervous system related to sensation and involuntary body functions, such as immune response and processes that regulate a person's blood pressure, blood flow and body temperature.

Q. What is the different between Medical Acupuncture and ordinary acupuncture?

Medical Acupuncture is the term used to describe acupuncture performed by a medical doctor trained and licensed in Western medicine who has also had thorough training in acupuncture as a specialty practice. Such a doctor can use either approach, or a combination of both as the need arises, to treat an illness.

Do not rely on a diagnosis of disease by a non-MD acupuncture practitioner who does not have substantial conventional medical training nor license to do so.

Q. What health problems can acupuncture help with?

In 1997, the National Institutes on Health Consensus Statement on Acupuncture found that there is clear evidence that acupuncture is effective for **post-operative pain, chemotherapy nausea and vomiting, nausea of pregnancy and post-operative dental pain**. In other situations, acupuncture may be useful as an adjunct treatment, an acceptable alternative or part of a comprehensive management program. These conditions include but are not limited to **addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, low-back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and asthma**.

Hawaii State Law: An acupuncture license is required to practice acupuncture in the State of Hawaii. Physician acupuncturists are not exempt.

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