

ACUPUNCTURE

The Ancient Chinese Art

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In Ancient China, operations were against the law so doctors couldn't open up the body to see how it worked. Instead, over time, they formulated the theory that we have a dynamic life force coursing through us called 'Qi', which is distributed throughout the body via a network of channels or meridians. The whole theory of acupuncture is based on balancing this vital force, which the ancients claimed would produce health if flowing smoothly and disease if it wasn't. The acupuncture points are situated along these pathways.

An acupuncture treatment consists, in part, of small, disposable needles being manipulated in specific points. It may produce a strange sensation of numbness, ripples, heat, aching or deep relaxation. Acupuncturists say they feel they are tuning a stringed instrument because they are boosting low energy at one point and calming chaotic energy at another until the body is balanced.



Yin and Yang

Acupuncturists also work to balance the Yin and Yang, which are polar opposites (the Yin being cold and the Yang hot). If, for example, someone is experiencing headaches, one possibility is that the Yang is in excess – and the heat rises to the head. In the case of heartburn, there may be too much heat in the stomach. If someone is experiencing diarrhea, the Yang may be deficient and the Qi weak.

So how do acupuncturists make their assessment? It is done through feeling the wrist pulse and looking at the tongue, which is like opening a book of the body because it reveals so much about our state of health. These indicate where the problem is and whether it's one of excess or deficiency. Is the energy too much (headache) or too little (diarrhea) or internal (disruption of Yin and Yang within the body).

Acupuncture is often known for relieving pain but acupuncturists say it's an entire medicine in its own right. Most of us are aware that acupuncture treats whiplash and back pain, but it also treats insomnia, headaches, digestive disorders, chronic fatigue, arthritis, smoking, stress and skin disorders.

Reaction from MDs

What do western medical doctors think of acupuncture? Some are uncomfortable about it, but some are now incorporating it into their own practice, such as Dr. David Gotlib who had a general practice, but often cross-referred patients and found the two modalities often complementary.

The history of Chinese medicinals, which are an integral part of acupuncture, is interesting. For instance, there's an herb called *Panax notoginseng* which is used to stop bleeding. The ancient folklore is that a

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farmer beat a snake senseless several times, each time thinking he had killed it – but it kept on reappearing. Intrigued by its resilience he noticed that it always crawled to a certain spot and munched on what looked like weeds, which seemed to heal its broken skin. That, so the story goes, is how this herb was discovered.

Traditional Chinese medicine is the oldest continuously practiced professional medicine in the world – and its goal is to help the body's natural energy to right itself.

Published in YOU magazine (Summer 1996)