



Acupuncture



A Short Course

Acupuncture has been used in the United States for a very brief time compared with its use in Asia. Acupuncture first began to experience some popularity in the United States after President Nixon returned from a visit to China in the early 1970's.

It has been estimated that more than 8 million Americans at one time or another have had acupuncture therapy for relief of pain or other distress.

There are now thousands of acupuncturists as well as physicians, dentists and other health professionals who have learned the technique and are using it to treat everything from migraine headaches to nausea, tennis elbow and even asthma.

A very positive step occurred in 1998 when the Food and Drug Administration approved acupuncture needles for licensed practitioners with the requirement that the needles be sterile, non-toxic and disposed of after a single use.



The needles are extremely thin and introduced under the skin at one or more specific sites and when properly done under sterile conditions, acupuncture is safe and relatively painless.

Some insurance carriers will reimburse for prescribed acupuncture even though its effectiveness remains controversial and its presumed mechanism of action is unclear. Each person would have to check with their insurance carrier to be certain.

Acupuncturists are now certified in 42 of the 50 states.



How Does It Work?

According to Chinese teaching, channels of energy (qi) run in patterns through the body and over its surface through meridians. Yin reflects qualities that are cold, slow and passive. Yang's qualities are hot, excited and active.

When the balance between the two is disturbed and the flow of qi is interrupted, symptoms develop. When acupuncture needles are placed at the appropriate site, the needle unblocks obstructions and helps the body restore homeostasis. Needling points stimulate the nervous system to release chemicals, which change the body's perception of pain.

Whatever the mechanism, modern imaging techniques have shown that acupuncture does stimulate certain areas within the brain and suppress others.

Research at the Mayo Clinic demonstrated that acupuncture was found to ease the pain and fatigue of fibromyalgia much more so than did a simulated procedure in which needles touches the skin but did not penetrate it.

1997 MIH Consensus Statement:

There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture's value to expand its use into conventional medicine. Acupuncture may be useful as an adjunct in treatment or an acceptable alternative in:

- Low back pain
- Osteoarthritis
- Fibromyalgia and myofascial pain
- Tennis elbow
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Stroke rehabilitation

Acupuncture seems to work best when used in conjunction with other treatments such as medication and physical therapy.

For example, acupuncture has shown to be an effective and safe adjunctive therapy to conventional care for patients with osteoarthritis of the knee.

There are different approaches, depending on the problem or the practitioner. Once the needles are inserted they can be moved manually or with a stimulator for additional effect.

Medicare does not cover acupuncture.

The body has 12 main energy pathways or meridians and 8 secondary meridians, as well as more than 2,000 acupuncture points that connect to them.



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My Recommendation

While I do not perform acupuncture personally, I think it does have some benefit in certain patients. Acupuncturists themselves actually indicate that approximately 80% of patients are helped by it. I have no way of knowing whether improvement is that effective or not. Nonetheless, if it is done safely and under sterile conditions by a certified acupuncturist, I think it is worth trying as an adjunct in things which I treat in the office such as back pain, chronic pain of various conditions, fibromyalgia, reflex sympathetic dystrophy, osteoarthritis and tennis elbow.

For more information, contact the American Association of Oriental Medicine at:
<http://www.aom.org>.



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Please consult Dr. Haverbush or a physician for specific treatment recommendations.

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