



Health & Wellness Monthly Newsletter

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ACUPUNCTURE

What is acupuncture?

Contrary to popular Western belief, acupuncture is not just a system for inserting very fine needles into specific body locations to alleviate pain. So, what is acupuncture, then? Acupuncture is a complete medical protocol focused on correcting imbalances of energy in the body. From its inception in China more than 2,500 years ago, acupuncture has been used traditionally to prevent, diagnose and treat disease, as well as to improve general health.

The traditional explanation for acupuncture's effectiveness is that it modifies the flow of energy (known as qi or chi) throughout the body, but there is no scientific consensus that this is actually its mechanism of action. Research published in the May 30, 2010 online edition of *Nature Neuroscience* demonstrated that the effects of acupuncture needling include influencing the activity of adenosine, an amino acid which becomes active in the skin after an injury to ease pain. This may explain in part why pain relief is often experienced as one of the benefits of acupuncture. In fact, much research in the West has focused on this pain-relieving effect, rather than acupuncture's traditional role of balancing energy to address a wide range of disorders, and the more subtle mechanisms that may be responsible for its overall benefits to health.

Acupuncture was popularized in the States during the early 70's after President Nixon opened relations with China. At the time, a *New York Times* reporter, James Reston, had an appendectomy in a Chinese hospital using acupuncture as a means to decrease his post-surgical pain.

What is acupuncture used for?

Because the goal of acupuncture is to promote and restore the balance of energy, which flows throughout the body, the benefits of acupuncture can extend to a wide variety of conditions, from emotional disorders (anxiety, depression) to digestive complaints (nausea, vomiting, irritable bowel syndrome). It can be beneficial for pain syndromes due to an injury or associated with chronic degenerative diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis. It can also be helpful in treating neurological problems like migraines or Parkinson's disease, or as a rehabilitation strategy for individuals who suffered a stroke. Respiratory conditions, including sinusitis and asthma have been relieved with acupuncture, as have many gynecologic disorders and infertility. Acupuncture has also proved beneficial for reducing fatigue and addictions, and for promoting overall well-being.

Studies in the U.S. indicate that acupuncture can help relieve chronic low back pain, dental pain, migraine headaches, fibromyalgia and symptoms of osteoarthritis. It has been shown to assist in the treatment of emotional pain syndromes such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as controlling chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. It has also demonstrated clinical success in achieving pregnancy when used in conjunction with in-vitro fertilization.

What should one expect on a visit to a practitioner of acupuncture?

Typically, the first acupuncture visit involves a comprehensive health history assessment. Questions that are included may seem strange, but in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) – which encompasses acupuncture, herbal medicine, massage and other modalities – energy flow and whole-body interaction are the keys to diagnosing all physical disease. For example, the practitioner may ask to examine your tongue, feel your pulse to help determine energy flow, or ask many questions related to bowel habits and diet, even if these seem to have nothing to do with the primary complaint.

ACUPUNCTURE (continued)



Apple Cake Squares

Ingredients

1 cup whole wheat pastry flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon cinnamon
3 tablespoons sugar
3 tablespoons softened butter or Spectrum Spread
2 eggs
2 cups apples, peeled, cored, finely shredded
1/4 cup finely chopped dates
1/4 cup confectioners' sugar
GARNISH (Optional)
1/4 cup finely chopped walnuts
1/4 cup maple syrup

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Mix the flour, salt, nutmeg, baking soda, and cinnamon together in a medium bowl and stir thoroughly.

Cream the sugar and butter together in a large bowl. Beat in the eggs and whisk until smooth. Stir in the shredded apples and dates until they are completely distributed throughout.

Slowly stir in the dry ingredients and mix thoroughly into the batter.

Spray the bottom and sides of a 9-inch square baking pan with nonstick cooking spray, or grease it with 1/4 teaspoon of butter and pour in the batter. Bake in the preheated oven for about 45 minutes.

Put the confectioners' sugar in a sifter and dust it over the cooled cake a few times until all the sugar is gone. If you want to garnish, mix the walnuts with the maple syrup and drizzle over individual serving plates. Cut the Apple Cake into 9 squares and arrange each one on top of a decorated plate and serve.

After the initial acupuncture consultation and assessment, the needles are placed in very specific locations. Upon insertion, one may feel a momentary sharp or stinging sensation; however, many report they don't even feel the majority of the insertions. It is common to experience a deep ache for a short time in some of the points. The acupuncture needles may then be gently manipulated and some practitioners may use heat or even electricity with the needles.

The depth to which the acupuncture needles are inserted varies according to the treatment and the practitioner; however, needles should never be positioned deep enough to puncture organs (other than the skin). The needles are usually left in place for five to 20 minutes, usually no longer than 60 minutes, and then removed. Following an acupuncture treatment, practitioners will usually reassess the client and often give suggestions for home care. It is also typical to suggest supplemental Chinese herbs to enhance the achievement of energetic balance. Acute symptoms may require only two to four treatments; whereas for chronic cases, it is common to have as many as 12 or more treatments, usually over a course of eight to 10 weeks. Regular monthly visits may be suggested as preventive measures to decrease stress, improve energy or boost immunity.

Are there any acupuncture side effects or indications where acupuncture should be avoided?

Those with bleeding disorders or who are taking blood thinners should check with their doctors before having acupuncture. The most common acupuncture side effects are bleeding and bruising at the site, along with minor pain and soreness. It is recommended that a disinfectant such as alcohol be swabbed over the area prior to needle insertion to decrease the very small possibility of infection. Obviously, needles should be clean and never shared between clients. Rarely, a needle may break. The worst case scenario is a punctured organ.

However, serious complications are extremely rare when acupuncture is performed by a qualified, certified practitioner. A review of the international research literature revealed pneumothorax (a punctured lung) to be the only life-threatening complication to have occurred among tens of thousands of patients over nine separate trials. No post-acupuncture infections were reported in any of the studies.

How does one find an acupuncture practitioner?

If you are considering seeing an acupuncturist, you should discuss this therapy with your primary care physician or integrative medicine practitioner, if you have one. Because acupuncture is growing in popularity, your doctor may be aware of qualified practitioners in the area and offer certain recommendations for you depending on your conditions. This referral may also be required for insurance coverage, depending on your policy. Web search engines can often assist in finding local acupuncturists, and usually provide their credentials for your review if your physician doesn't have a referral.

Source: www.drweil.com

