



TANYA I. EDWARDS, MD, CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE
AND LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

Acupuncture

What is acupuncture?

For more than 3,500 years, acupuncture has been providing relief to people around the world. Originally developed and practiced in China, this soothing therapy is today embraced by all patients who seek to alleviate symptoms caused by ailments that range from arthritis to migraines to the after-effects of chemotherapy. It has even been proven effective in helping people stop smoking!

How does acupuncture work?

Acupuncture draws on the belief that an energy called Qi (pronounced “chee”) circulates throughout our body, from the top of our head to the soles of our feet. When we experience good health, this energy flows unobstructed along pathways in the body called meridians. Each meridian is believed to be connected to a specific organ system, and when an energy flow is disrupted by a disease or an injury, illness or pain occurs. Acupuncture is then used to balance the flow of Qi and stimulate our body’s natural ability to heal.

Acupuncture treatments involve placing hair-thin needles of varying lengths into certain areas of the skin. The number of slender needles – as few as three, as many as 20 – and the length of time they are kept in place depends on the ailment being treated. During the treatment, the needles may be twirled, warmed or electrically energized to intensify healing effects.

Acupuncture sessions generally run for 45 to 60 minutes. Patients lie on a padded table, and soothing music plays in the background. Some patients say they feel an electrical sensation during a treatment, which is good – because that means healing energy is moving through the body. But most people end up falling asleep on the table.

In addition, many treatments include a lesson on how to use acupressure on yourself. At home, patients can self-treat by using their fingers to apply pressure on certain points.

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Why does acupuncture work?

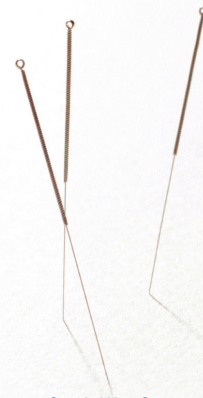
Many acupuncture points are near nerves. When stimulated, the point sends a message along the nerve to the brain and spinal cord. This causes the brain to release chemicals such as endorphins. These are chemicals our own body produces that alter or eliminate the message of pain being delivered to the brain. The release of these “feel-good” mood-regulating chemicals makes people feel better physically and emotionally. And when someone’s emotional outlook improves, their quality of life improves.

Clinical studies have shown that acupuncture bolsters various systems within the body, including the nervous system and the immune system. Acupuncture also decreases the inflammation associated with different diseases and relieves muscle spasms and strain.

What diseases or ailments does acupuncture treat?

The World Health Organization endorses acupuncture, and clinical studies have shown it to be a beneficial treatment for many conditions, including:

- Chronic pain: migraines, neck and back pain, tendonitis, sciatica, carpal tunnel syndrome, fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis
- Digestive disorders: irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, gastritis and constipation
- Urinary and reproductive disorders: menstrual cramps, irregular or heavy periods, infertility and menopausal symptoms
- Psychological and emotional disorders: depression, anxiety, stress and insomnia
- Symptom management for the negative side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, including fatigue, generalized pain, dry mouth, peripheral neuropathy, nausea and vomiting
- Seasonal allergies
- High blood pressure
- Addictions to nicotine, alcohol and drugs
- Overweight or obesity, when coupled with diet and exercise



What does acupuncture feel like?

Some patients may feel a tiny prick when the hair-thin needle is inserted. Others feel a tickle. But many patients don't feel a thing.

Does acupuncture take the place of traditional medicine?

No. Acupuncture is not a substitute for conventional medical diagnosis and treatment. However, it can complement your traditional treatment plan. For example, many patients undergoing chemotherapy also use acupuncture as a way to lessen the side effects associated with chemotherapy. Acupuncture has also been used as a complementary therapy for various pain conditions and for allergies, asthma, sinusitis and infertility. Acupuncture is also used in conjunction with physical therapy for rehabilitation from serious injury.

Do I have to believe in acupuncture for it to work?

No. Acupuncture works regardless of your beliefs.

Is an acupuncturist a legitimate healthcare professional?

Yes. In Ohio, acupuncture practitioners must be licensed, possess a master's degree and be able to demonstrate proficiency in both a classroom setting and in a clinical environment. Plus, all licensed acupuncturists must pass board exams in Eastern and Western medicine. Search the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine website at nccaom.org for licensed acupuncturists in your area. You can also visit your state's medical board website to be sure that the acupuncturist has a valid medical license with no disciplinary actions.

Acupuncture services are offered at various Cleveland Clinic facilities. Please check our website or call for an updated list of locations.

To schedule an appointment for acupuncture or other forms of integrative medicine, call [**216.448.HEAL\(4325\)**](tel:216.448.HEAL(4325)).

No physician referral is needed for appointments with our experienced acupuncturists.

For more information on all services offered through the Tanya I. Edward, MD, Center for Integrative and Lifestyle Medicine, visit [**clevelandclinic.org/wellness**](http://clevelandclinic.org/wellness).