

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How does Acupuncture work, from a Western medical perspective?** One theory proposed by Western researchers is that acupuncture triggers the release of **endorphins**, the body's natural painkillers. This idea hasn't been proven and conventional medicine still cannot explain this ancient theory, but a number of studies show that acupuncture does bring about real physiological changes, sometimes far from the point where needles are inserted. In one study, for example, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center used advanced imaging equipment to view the brains of nine patients while they underwent acupuncture. In every case, the researchers saw **blood flow increase** in the thalamus, a relay station for pain messages in the brain. Regarding biomechanics, there is a physiological reaction to acupuncture at the site of insertion called *de qi*, or needle grasp. Needle grasp has been quantified in one study by measuring the force necessary to pull an inserted needle out of the tissues. This sensation is perceived by a patient as a dull ache or heaviness at the site of insertion. Manipulation is used to enhance needle grasp, which can be used as feedback by the practitioner as a level indicating how effective the amount of rotation was at that acupuncture point. This mechanical pairing of needle and connective tissue during manipulation and rotation indicates that a signal has been sent to tissue cells and from this it can be determined whether treatment has occurred. In a recent study (2010) at University of Rochester, research focused on **adenosine**, a natural compound known for its role in regulating sleep, for its effects on the heart, and for its anti-inflammatory properties. Adenosine also acts as a natural painkiller, becoming active in the skin after an injury to inhibit nerve signals and ease pain in a way similar to lidocaine. This is another theory as to the origin of pain-relieving effects of acupuncture. *If you would like to read more about these studies, please ask me to see articles at your next appointment.*
- **Why has Acupuncture grown popular in America in recent years?** The practice of acupuncture to treat identifiable pathophysiological conditions in American medicine was rare until **President Nixon** visited China in 1972. It was at that time that he established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, bringing the opportunity to exchange information and learn from their tradition of medicine. Since that time, there has been burgeoning interest in the United States and Europe in the application of acupuncture to Western medicine. In 1997, after looking at many studies and interviewing leading researchers, a panel of experts convened by the **National Institutes of Health** concluded that acupuncture is an effective treatment for nausea and vomiting caused by

chemotherapy, surgery in adults and post-operative dental pain. Getting needled, the panel said, can also be helpful in combination with other therapies in the treatment of addictions, stroke rehabilitation, headaches, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, low-back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, asthma and much more. Furthermore, The **World Health Organization's** support of acupuncture has helped increase global awareness of this ancient medicine.

- **What types of Acupuncture are there?** There are a variety of approaches to diagnosis and treatment in American acupuncture that incorporates medical traditions from China, Japan, Korea, and other countries. In the United States, practitioners most often use the type of acupuncture based on **Traditional Chinese Medicine**, which restores the natural flow of energy by stimulating points throughout the body that correspond to various organ systems. **Five Element Acupuncture** is an ancient Chinese technique used to treat problems of the body, mind and spirit. It is based on the idea that health, just like everything else in the universe, is governed by the five elements: water, wood, fire, earth, and metal. **Japanese Acupuncture** is more subtle than its Chinese counterpart. Its needles are thinner and shorter, and they barely pierce the skin. Japanese acupuncture is divided into two forms: root and local. Root acupuncture addresses the total energy imbalance in the body, while local acupuncture treats specific symptoms. **Korean Hand Acupuncture** is similar to auricular acupuncture, except that the focal point is the hand, rather than the ear. Points on the hand meridians, when stimulated, correspond to various parts of the body. **Auricular Acupuncture** was developed in France and it focuses all of the body's acupuncture points in just the ear. Points are located all over the ears and each point is connected to an area (or areas) of the body. When a point is stimulated, it creates electrical impulses that flow via the brain to a specific part of the body. Auricular acupuncture is believed to be just as effective as whole body acupuncture, because stimulating the ear is thought to affect qi flow throughout the body.
- **What specialty fields of Acupuncture exist?** In addition to the aforementioned Auricular Acupuncture, there are other specialized fields of acupuncture as well. Some of these are: facial rejuvenation, sports medicine, and animal acupuncture. **Facial Rejuvenation** improves muscle tone and integrity, reduces fine lines and wrinkles, stimulates circulation and can also be referred to as cosmetic acupuncture. **Sports Medicine Acupuncture** can be used anywhere on the body where muscle tightness is possible; back, shoulder, elbow, knee, hip, feet, wrists. All muscles have an area where there is communication with the central nervous system. These are called motor points. This modality involves understanding

biomechanics of orthopedic conditions, performing an orthopedic evaluation of musculoskeletal conditions, and generating a diagnosis and treatment plan in order to treat the patient's injury. There is also **Animal Acupuncture**, mainly performed by Veterinarians in the U.S., and has been gaining popularity in the past two decades, possibly due to the desire to introduce holistic medicine to animals as a non-invasive alternative to treating certain conditions. There are also advanced applications of acupuncture with regard to **Fertility, Dermatology, Pediatrics** and others to name a few.

- **What is the process an Acupuncturist goes through for credentialing? Can just anyone become an acupuncturist?** Acupuncturists must possess a Bachelor's degree and complete a postgraduate program, accredited by a nationally governing body, which usually takes 3 years to matriculate. While earning a **Master's** in this field is a terminal degree, the highest degree possible is a Doctorate. Licensed acupuncturists must adhere to the state's laws in which they practice. Acupuncturists must also have taken and passed the **Clean Needle Technique** course which covers sterilization of equipment, transmission of blood-borne pathogens, and disposal of contaminated waste safely. An acupuncturist who passes the national exam is certified by the **National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine** (NCCAOM). One who passes the Clean Needle Technique course is certified by the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM).
- **Can I see my regular doctors while I am in acupuncture treatment, or is it intended as a replacement for my current healthcare?** Acupuncture is not intended to be a replacement for western medicine. While some may elect to use it as their sole form of healthcare, it is not common in the States. Acupuncture is very effective when a patient **complements** it with conventional healthcare. (Many prefer the term 'complementary' or 'integrative' to 'alternative' medicine). The most important thing is to keep your acupuncturist informed of western medical diagnoses you have. It is a good idea to let your medical doctor know that you are in treatment, so he or she can coordinate your acupuncture with the rest of your medical care.
- **What if I am not sick? Do I still need to come for Acupuncture?** Chinese Medicine works on a **'wellness' model versus a 'treatment' model**. The goal for treatment is not just to get back to where you were physically or emotionally *before* you needed treatment, but rather to see you accomplish an even *better* state of health overall. I want to help you to achieve optimal wellness rather than just receive symptom relief. I believe that acupuncture has something to offer everyone, a chance to heal, flourish and thrive.