

Acupuncture

Acupuncture: what is it?

Acupuncture is a method of encouraging the body to promote natural healing and to improve functioning. This is done by inserting needles and applying heat or electrical stimulation at very precise acupuncture points.



How does acupuncture work?

Classical Chinese Explanation - Channels of energy run in regular patterns through the body and over its surface. These energy channels, called meridians, are like rivers flowing through the body to irrigate and nourish the tissues. An obstruction in the movement of these energy rivers is like a dam that backs up the flow in one part of the body and restricts it in others.

The meridians can be influenced by needling the acupuncture points; the acupuncture needles unblock the obstructions at the dams, and re-establish the regular flow through the meridians. Acupuncture treatments can therefore help the body's internal organs to correct imbalances in their digestion, absorption, and energy through the meridians.

Modern Scientific Explanation - Needling the acupuncture points stimulates the nervous system to release chemicals in the muscles, spinal cord, and brain. These chemicals will either change the experience of pain, or they will trigger the release of other chemicals and hormones which influence the body's own internal regulating system.

The improved energy and biochemical balance produced by acupuncture results in stimulating the body's natural healing abilities, and in promoting physical and emotional well-being.

What is the scope of acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a system which can influence three areas of health care:

- Promotion of health and well-being,
- Prevention of illness,
- Treatment of various medical conditions.

While acupuncture is often associated with pain control, in the hands of a well-trained practitioner it has much broader applications. Acupuncture can be effective as the only treatment used, or as the support or adjunct to other medical treatment forms in many medical and surgical disorders.

The World Health Organization recognizes the use of acupuncture in the treatment of a wide range of problems, including:

- Muscular and neurological disorders: headaches, facial tics, neck pain, rib neuritis, frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, various forms of tendonitis, low back pain, sciatica, osteoarthritis.
- Digestive disorders: gastritis, and hyper-acidity, spastic colon, constipation, diarrhea.

- Respiratory disorders: Sinusitis, sore throat, bronchitis, asthma, recurrent chest infections.
- Urinary, menstrual, and reproductive problems.

Acupuncture is particularly useful in resolving physical problems related to tension and stress and emotional conditions.

At Queen West Physiotherapy & Acupuncture, our acupuncturist treats many of the conditions listed above as well as many more. In addition to the use of acupuncture, he is trained in Traditional Chinese Medicine. This enables him to provide herbs and offer specific diet and lifestyle recommendations to significantly improve a variety of conditions and eliminate the cause of the client's problem.

How many treatments will I need?

The number of treatments needed differs from person to person. For complex or long-standing conditions, one or two treatments a week for several months may be recommended. For acute problems, usually fewer visits are required, and for health maintenance, four sessions a year may be all that is necessary.

Are there any side effects to the treatment?

Usually not. As energy is redirected in the body, internal chemicals and hormones are stimulated and healing begins to take place. Occasionally, the original symptoms worsen for a few days, or other general changes in appetite, sleep, bowel or urination patterns, or emotional state may be triggered. These should not cause concern, as they are simply indications that the acupuncture is starting to work.

It is quite common with the first one or two treatments to have a sensation of deep relaxation or even mild disorientation immediately following the treatment. These pass within a short time, and never require anything more than a bit of rest to overcome.

What are the needles like? Do they hurt?

People experience acupuncture needling differently. Most patients feel only minimal pain as the needles are inserted; some feel no pain at all. Once the needles are in place, there is no pain felt.

Acupuncture needles are very thin and solid and are made from stainless steel. The point is smooth (not hollow with cutting edges like a hypodermic needle) and insertion through the skin is not as painful as injections or blood sampling. The risk of bruising and skin irritation is less than when using a hollow needle.

Because only disposable needles are used, there is no risk of infection from the treatments.

Does acupuncture really work?

Yes. In the past 2,000 years, more people have been successfully treated with acupuncture than with all other health modalities combined. Today acupuncture is practiced widely in Asia, the Soviet Union, and in Europe. It is now being used more and more in North America.

Acupuncture treatments can be given at the same time other techniques are being used, such as conventional Western medicine, physiotherapy hands-on treatment techniques and herbal medicine. It is important that your acupuncturist know everything that you are doing, so he or she can help you get the most benefit from all your treatments.