

Needles & Pins

By Devyani Jayakar Tibrewala



Acupuncture (from Lat. *acus*, 'needle' and *pungere*, 'prick') is a technique of inserting needles into the muscles and tendons beneath the skin, at one or more named points that are said to represent various internal organs. These 'acupoints' may not be in the same area of the body as the targeted symptom and are generally located where imaginary horizontal and vertical meridians meet on the surface of the body.

CHI (vital energy) is believed to flow through the body along 14 main pathways called meridians. When energies are in harmony, chi flows freely within the body and a person is healthy. When a person is sick, diseased, or injured, there is an obstruction of chi along one of the meridians. Traditional Chinese medicine has identified some 500 specific points where needles are to be inserted for specific effects. The definition and characterization of these points is standardized by the World Health Organization.

ANCIENT DIAGNOSIS

In Traditional Chinese Medicine there are four diagnostic methods: inquiring, inspection, palpation and auscultation. In many forms of classical Chinese acupuncture, as well as Japanese acupuncture, palpation of the muscles and the hara (abdomen) are central to diagnosis. Diagnosis was also based upon the history of the patient's symptoms, the appearance of the patient's tongue, and the state of the weather. Because dissection of the human body was not practiced, internal organs were imagined in rather odd positions and shapes, and some organs were invented. One of these was the 'triple warmer,' whose precise location baffles even the most astute translator of Chinese acupuncture classics.

MODERN TREATMENT

Most modern acupuncturists use disposable stainless steel needles, sterilized with ethylene oxide or by autoclave. The upper third of these needles is wound with a thicker wire or covered in plastic, to stiffen the needle and provide a handle for the acupuncturist to grasp while inserting. The size and type of needle used, and the depth of insertion, depend on the acupuncture style being practiced. Today, the needles are twirled, heated, or even stimulated with weak electrical current,



ultrasound, or certain wavelengths of light. Traditional acupuncture involves the use of high-quality stainless steel, silver, or copper needles.

In 1996, the Food and Drug Administration changed the status of acupuncture needles from Class III to Class II medical devices, meaning that needles are regarded as safe and effective when used appropriately by licensed practitioners.

WHAT TO EXPECT?

In acupuncture a common treatment for headaches is to stimulate the sensitive points that are located roughly in the center of the webs between the thumbs and the palms of the patient. The patient reclines, and the points on each hand are first sterilized with alcohol, and then thin, disposable needles are inserted to a depth of approximately 3-5 mm until a characteristic 'tinge' is felt by the patient, often accompanied by a slight twitching of the area between the thumb and hand. Most patients report a pleasurable tingling sensation and feeling of relaxation while the needles are in place. The

needles are retained for 15-20 minutes while the patient rests, and then are removed.

BENEFITS

Acupuncture may obviate the need for surgery, which is a more invasive as well as expensive. Pain killers, which have their own side effects, often become unnecessary. Rest and recuperation also requires less time.

RISKS

Acupuncture is not without risks. Injuries are rare among patients treated by trained practitioners, however, there have been some reports of lung and bladder punctures, some broken needles, nerve damage, local hematoma (due to bleeding from a punctured blood vessel), and some allergic reactions to needles containing substances other than surgical steel. Also, the herbs used by acupuncture practitioners are not regulated for safety, potency, or effectiveness.

ACUPUNCTURE IN INDIA

Dr. Rumi Byramji's Hospital deals

mainly in orthopedic cases which may be better handled by acupuncture than by allopathic treatment. Dr. Byramji himself has an MBBS degree, a Diploma in Hospital Management and a surgical background in orthopedic cases. After some time in allopathic, he felt that something was amiss in the treatment given to patients, and decided to explore other avenues. He then studied acupuncture in Colombo, and is now a certified MD.

The treatment he prescribes is a combination of acupuncture, yoga, allopathic and Kerala Therapy. What's more, for 80% of his cases, electrodes are used instead of needles, for which he has special equipment from Germany. He treats mainly orthopedic cases such as sciatica, spondylosis, arthritis, frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, spur in the heel, cervical as well as lumbar

slipped disc and also migraines.

Dr. Byramji says that 80% of his cases come to him when they are due for surgery, but of the 10,000 cases he has treated so far, only 450 have needed to be operated upon. Ask him about his stand on whether acupuncture is an alternative or a complementary therapy, and he speaks with the conviction of a savant. "Acupuncture is neither an alternative nor a complementary therapy. It is the prime choice. It is surgery which is the alternative".

He says, "There is no specialization in acupuncture, which is why people think that they can treat all manner of ailments after doing a basic course. This is why a good science has been given a bad name". Doubting skeptics take note, this is no quack or fly-by-night operator talking, but one who has the full weight of allopathy behind him.

ACUPUNCTURE IN INDIA

1. HOW MUCH

A 10 session package costs Rs 5000 at Rumi Byramji's Hospital.

2. THE SCHEDULE

On an average, 1 hour per joint is required for the treatment to be effective. Most of the time, 10 such sessions are adequate. With acupuncture, unlike surgery bed rest is minimal, hence there is early mobilization.

3. WHERE TO DO IT

Dr. Dedhia, G.T. Hospital, Crawford Market, Mumbai.

Dr. Rumi Byramji's Hospital, Opp. Central Cinema, Mumbai. Tel: 2369 2772 / 0220.

Dr. R. B. Lohia, Aurangabad. Tel: 93720 07799 / 98220 58501.

4. WHY DO IT

Dr. Byramji advocates that surgery should be a last resort. He also prefers not to use either pain killers or supportive belts.

