

Acupuncture and Pain Control

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For 2500 years now the Chinese have successfully used acupuncture and herbs for pain control. It was not until the seventies when a journalist by the name of James Reston came back from a trip to China with actual film footage of surgeries being performed with only needle anesthesia, that the Western medical community started to take note. Gradually since then, acupuncturists have been opening practices, new schools have been established, and the American public is demanding it. There is now a nationally accredited licensing board, NCCAOM, the National Council of Chinese Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, which regulates standards of care.

In the December 2002 issue of Newsweek magazine, the cover shows needles in a patient's face for pain control, depression, and/or a sinus condition. The article, entitled Learning from China, explains that modern scientists are looking at Acupuncture's validity and trying to explain how herbs and stimulation of Acupuncture points effect change. The western mind wants proof and is starting to verify that these age old remedies work, especially for pain control and relief of nausea.

Chinese medicine, focusing on acupuncture and herbology, is a viable holistic option and a compliment to standard western medicines. Chinese medicine is the oldest secular, professional, and continually practiced medicine in the world today. The methodology of Chinese Medicine is based on bringing a patient to a state of healthy balance. Practitioners do not believe in treating just symptoms of disease, but rather they concentrate on the entire person. The overall approach in Chinese medicine is a holistic consideration of health and disease, and carefully examines the interplay between the two.

When a person has a symptom, Chinese medicine looks to see how such a symptom fits in the patients overall body pattern. When someone falls ill, it is imperative to look at all aspects of that person's life for imbalance. Symptoms are signs to the practitioner that the body is not properly balanced in one or more of four categories; spiritual energy, environment, emotion, and lifestyle. Because Chinese medicine is so all-encompassing, working to

mend both body and spirit, it is often very effective in treating chronic disorders, or in cases where there is a persistent unresponsiveness.

Chinese medicine excels in some aspects due to its attention to the spiritual nature of people. Much of the diagnosis revolves around determining and understanding the imbalance of natural energies, including a patient's Yin and Yang (polar opposites of energy). Yin is the shady side of a slope, associated with cold, rest, passivity, darkness, interiors, downward motion, and decrease. Yang is the sunny side of a slope, associated with heat, stimulation, movement, activity, excitement, vigor, light, exteriors, and upward motion, and increase. Within the Yin and Yang of an individual, there are fundamental substances that an acupuncturist will observe and can measure. One such matter is Qi, matter on the verge of becoming energy, otherwise talked about as a person's life force. In terms of acupuncture blood is the liquid that circulates continuously, providing nourishment, maintenance, and moistness. Jing is the source of life or one's essence, supportive, nutritive, and the base for reproduction, and development (It is also believed our Jing is passed from parent to child and through the generations). The last component is Shen, our spirit and consciousness, or the vitality behind both the Qi and Jing.

Disharmonies affect these fundamental substances, and are the cause and effect of all imbalances. There are six pernicious influences, which can affect your body from the outside environment. They include wind, cold, fire/heat, dampness, dryness, and summer heat. These conditions, or natural events, become harmful only when the body has an improper relationship to one or more of them.

For many centuries, doctors practicing Chinese medicine have identified approximately 300 different patterns of imbalance in the body. Since these patterns often combine with one another to form even more complex patterns, the possible patterns of imbalance a person can manifest is almost limitless. Because of such intricacies, each patient receives his or her own individualized treatment plan.

The Chinese physician uses meridians, an invisible network of channels that carry energy to key locations throughout the body. These meridians connect not only the organs of one's body, but also allow the inside to communicate with

the outside, move Qi and blood, and regulate the Yin and Yang throughout. There exist points along the meridians that can open or transfer the flow of energy, and stimulation of these points can help to rebalance and regulate the body's harmonies.

A number of theories have been developed to explain the theory of anesthesia and pain relief through Acupuncture. The first is based on the Gate Theory of Pain which was first developed by Melzack and Wall in 1995. Applying this theory to Acupuncture, it is hypothesized that the stimulation from the needles blocks the lower nerve bundles in the central nervous system, thereby preventing pain signals from reaching the brain. Therefore during surgery, pain from an incision cannot be felt due to inhibition of the impulses to the brain.

Another theory of Acupuncture anesthesia suggests that the insertion of the Acupuncture needles may stimulate the release of endorphins, a chemical in the class of opiates naturally produced in the brain. These substances are remarkably potent painkillers and can be responsible for dulling the pain impulses, increasing the pain threshold, or decreasing the desire to report a stimulus as painful. Serotonin, a commonly stimulated endorphin, also confers a sense of well being which can mitigate some of the effects of pain and depression.

The fundamental etiology of pain in Chinese Medicine is one of qi and or blood stagnation in the meridians and the collateral channels. The obstruction is caused most commonly by invasion of pathogenic wind, cold or dampness. These painful syndromes all have different patterns and therefore different remedies. Dampness can cause multiple sites of pain and stiffness in the muscles and or joints and is often chronic. Exterior wind is often acute pain in the neck, upper back and shoulders and it comes on quickly. Cold causes sharp, stabbing, localized pain which is relieved by heat. Blood vacuity or insufficiency of flow, can cause mild muscular pain throughout the body.

After confirming any of the aforementioned causes via tongue and pulse diagnosis, treatment can begin. Treatment of pain can be accomplished with herbs and or stimulation of acupuncture points. It should be noted that Acupuncture is a principle and not a technique. This means that it can be performed in many ways and not just with needles.

Acupuncturists often use heat, massage, laser and mild electric current to stimulate points as well as needles. These options make the treatments easier for children, patients who have bleeding disorders, or are afraid of needles.

Acupuncturists treat certain points called xi-cleft which are where the qi and blood of the meridian converge, becoming stagnant, especially in acute pain syndromes. Needle placement can be local to the pain which is called "surrounding the dragon". These are often tender spots called ah shi points. Auricular or ear acupuncture is extremely helpful with surgical anesthesia. Needles can also be placed on the opposite limb or far from the pain and still effect results. This is based on the polar opposition theory of yin and yang.

As with most medicine, each condition requires its own set of protocols. In general, very acute pain is often treated daily for one week to 10 days. Chronic conditions are treated for at least a few months at 2 times per week. Needles are retained for approximately 20 minutes per treatment. Conditions commonly helped are: headache, nausea, arthritis, sinus, tendinitis, back and neck pain, menstrual cramps, plantar fasciitis and carpal tunnel. With some patients Acupuncture has been the only source of relief, and many patients have been spared the consequences of protracted drug therapy.

Acupuncture is a complex and difficult concept to grasp for many in our western society. In spite of this fact many are seeking the care of trained acupuncturists looking for cures and alleviation of symptoms. If this is the case, it is wise to find an Acupuncturist who is a Diplomate of an accredited institution, the designation being Dipl. Ac. You should be able to set up a complimentary consultation and get some of your questions answered first. The wisdom of the ages can be appreciated for its non-pharmaceutical treatment, simple application, wide range of use and good curative effect.

Dr. Fitelson is a Diplomate in Acupuncture with the NCCAOM. She has been a holistic physician for 23 years and practices in the Clayton Richmond Heights area at the InMotion Health Center. As a health educator, she helps you to understand your condition and gives you choices

regarding care. Call for a complimentary consultation and a tour of the clinic, 314-644-2081.