

Acupuncture is almost synonymous with Chinese medicine in the West. But it is only one branch of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). TCM has been the primary healthcare system in China for thousands of years. It is a very comprehensive and complex system that involves a variety of modalities. There are five main branches: acupuncture, herbal medicine, medical Qigong, tuina, and food therapy. Acupuncture **includes the procedure of inserting needles into various points on the body for therapeutic purposes.**

What Can Acupuncture Treat?

The National Institute of Health and World Health Organization have recognized the use of acupuncture in the treatment of a wide range of common illnesses including:

Neurological-Musculoskeletal Disorders and Pain

Joint Pain, Bone Pain, Nerve Pain, Muscle Pain, Headache and Migraine, TMJ, Frozen Shoulder, Tennis Elbow, Sciatica, Low Back Pain, Knee Pain, Sports Injuries and Pains, Toothache, Post-operative Dental Pain, Osteoarthritis, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Fibromyalgia, Chronic Fatigue, Trigeminal Neuralgias, Intercostal Neuralgia, Cervicobrachial Syndrome, Facial Palsy (early stage, i.e., within 3-6 months), Paralysis Following a Stroke, Peripheral Neuropathies, Sequelae of Poliomyelitis (early stage, i.e., within 6 months), Meniere's Disease, Neurogenic Bladder Dysfunction, and Nocturnal Enuresis (bedwetting)

Mental Emotional Problems

Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Insomnia

Other illnesses include Common Cold and Flu, Bronchial Asthma, Spasms of esophagus, Hiccough, Gastroptosis, Acute and Chronic Gastritis, Gastric Hyperacidity, Chronic Duodenal Ulcer (pain relief), GERDs, IBS, Nausea, Vomiting, Constipation, Diarrhea, Premenstrual Syndrome, Dysmenorrhea (menstrual cramps), Addiction, Smoking Cessation, etc.

How Does Acupuncture Work?

The human body is viewed as a microcosmic universe in acupuncture theory. The body is connected with the natural environment. Inside the body, the channel system connects the internal organs, bones, tendons, muscles, blood vessels and skin into a whole. **There is Qi - energy and invisible matter - flowing in the channel system, accompanying the visible structures.** Acupuncture points are where the Qi flows through, entering or exiting the body. A person's health is influenced by the flow of Qi in the body. **When its pathways become obstructed, deficient, excessive, or just unbalanced, it causes illness.**

The goal of acupuncture treatment is to restore the body's balance. In an acupuncture treatment, four diagnostic methods are used to collect information on the patient. Those methods include inspection, auscultation and olfaction (listening and smelling), inquiring, and palpation. A pattern differentiation is given to indicate the location of the illness (shallow or deep), the strength of pathogenic Qi and the body's vital Qi (excess or deficiency), and the nature of the illness (cold or heat). Based on this pattern

differentiation, a personalized treatment plan will be made to activate the body's vital Qi or to remove the pathogenic Qi with different acupuncture points and techniques.

The acupuncture needles used in the treatment are sterile and disposable. They are very small and thin. The needle sensations during the treatment may vary depending on each person's sensitivity and the techniques acupuncturists use. During the insertion, there might be no sensation. Or if any sensation is experienced, it is often compared to a mosquito bite and disappears very quickly. Once the needles pass through the skin, they may be inserted to various depths and manipulated to obtain a **Qi sensation**. Often people describe the sensations **as moving, tingling, heavy, numb or warming**.

Through regulating Qi in the body, acupuncture improves the body's innate healing ability and restores the body's balance. Health is balance. Once balance is achieved, the illnesses go away.

How Does Acupuncture Work from a Scientific Perspective?

Many Western scientists and practitioners view the acupuncture points as places to stimulate nerves, muscles and connective tissue.

There are five theories from the scientific perspective regarding how acupuncture works:

- **"Augmentation of Immunity" Theory**
Acupuncture raises levels of specific hormones, prostaglandins, white blood cell counts, gamma globulins, and overall anti-body levels.
- **"Endorphin" Theory**
Acupuncture stimulates the secretions of endorphins in the body. Endorphins are our body's natural pain killers.
- **"Neurotransmitter" Theory**
Acupuncture affects certain neurotransmitter levels such as Serotonin and Noradrenalin. This is why acupuncture is so successful with stress, depression and mood disorders.
- **"Circulatory" Theory**
Acupuncture has the effect of constricting or dilating blood vessels. This may be caused by the body's release of vasodilators, such as Histamine, in response to acupuncture.
- **"Gate Control" Theory**
According to this theory, acupuncture closes certain nerve gates by strategically overloading them with impulses, thus reducing pain transmission.

In the acupuncture clinic, other commonly used procedures include acupressure, moxibustion, cupping, guasha, and electrical acupuncture. The other four branches of TCM - herbal medicine, medical Qigong, tuina and food therapy - may also be used in combination with acupuncture for better effects.