

# THE USES OF ACUPUNCTURE

Use of alternative treatment therapies have increased dramatically in the last ten to fifteen. Public awareness and acceptance of the efficacy of non traditional therapies by western medical practitioners has grown, and more people seek to distance themselves from the side effects of traditional drugs. The acceptance of alternative treatments is supported by the fact that many health insurers will now reimburse for prescribed non traditional treatments.

One of the more widely used alternative therapies is acupuncture. This therapy is over 5,000 years old and is purported to have originated in China. However, there is evidence that ancient societies of Egyptians, South African Bantu tribesmen, Arabs, Eskimos and Brazilian cannibals have used some version of this therapy with sharp stones, bamboo and fish bones. The current form of acupuncture most often practiced uses ultra fine needles. In 1996 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved of the use of acupuncture needles for licensed practitioners with the requirement that the needles be sterile, nontoxic and disposed of after single use.

The major use of acupuncture today is for the relief of pain from tension headaches, migraines, acute backaches, sports injuries, post surgery pain and toothaches. Other uses include treatment of digestive disorders, respiratory problems including asthma, bronchitis, and sinus infection, allergies and heart problems.

Given that this therapy is used for so many ailments, many studies have been conducted to determine how acupuncture works. The reality is that no one knows exactly how it works but there is consensus that the practice is based on the understanding that a vital energy called Qi (pronounced chee) flows along channels or meridians throughout the body. Qi is composed of two opposing forces - yin and yang. When the balance between these forces is disturbed and the flow of Qi is interrupted, symptoms develop. Acupuncture needles placed at critical points along the meridians can stimulate the body resulting in the restoration of the flow of Qi.

One explanation in western medical terms of acupuncture's efficacy is that when the needles prick the skin they cause the brain to release a number of "pain-killing" neural (or nerve) chemicals such as endorphins, enkephalins and other opioid like substances. Modern imaging techniques have shown that acupuncture does stimulate certain areas within the brain and suppresses others.

If you choose to use acupuncture as a therapy, the practitioner should be certified and licensed. With the influx of "eastern" therapies into western traditional treatments, a growing number of medical doctors have been trained in acupuncture techniques and may blend traditional and non traditional methods for pain management and a host of other ailments.

## REFERENCES:

The Uses of Acupuncture

History of Acupuncture

Does Acupuncture Really Work?

What is Acupuncture?