

acupuncture

what's old is new again

by Dr. Joy Jun-Jie Yang, LAc

Many people today who may be afraid of acupuncture think, "This is one of those new-age treatments they only use in California. Why would I want to try something this wacky?" Many Americans weren't even aware of acupuncture until the 1970's, when reporters covering Richard Nixon's visit to China reported on a "miraculous" healing art. But this doesn't mean it's a new healing art. Chinese medicine has utilized acupuncture for thousands of years. And today's acupuncturist draws upon the knowledge compiled in writings and teachings that have made sick people well for that same timespan. How's that for a tried and true method?

Acupuncture is one component of the holistic health care system. Holistic, meaning whole, treats the complete person -- body, mind, and spirit. Holism focuses on wellness versus simply treating symptoms. Sometimes people in pain are only treated for the obvious symptoms they are displaying. Acupuncture not only treats the symptoms, but also the underlying root problem causing the pain. Even more important to some people is the fact that acupuncture almost never has side effects. There are no warning labels saying, "This may damage your liver."

One of the philosophies underlying Chinese medicine is that we are not separate from nature; the inner ecosystem of our body matches nature's constant motion with its flowing seasons and cycles. The acupuncturist's goal is to keep your body in harmony. To do this, they focus on 14 major energy channels called meridians that course through the human body. A subtle energy called Chi circulates via these meridians to all regions of the body. According to Eastern philosophy, Chi is the life force of our bodies. Its balanced, unimpeded flow is critical to sound health. Any misdirection or blockage of the Chi may result in pain, dysfunction, and ill health. With acupuncture needles, the acupuncturist stimulates certain points along the course of the meridians. This helps restore the normal balance and flow of chi so that organs and bodily systems can work together in harmony. This then sets the stage for the body to repair itself and maintain its own health. Consequently, acupuncture can be effective in treating a wide range of ailments. Addictions, allergies, arthritis, asthma, colitis, depression, heart problems, and infertility are just a few of the conditions that can be treated.

For many people, the idea of having needles inserted in their bodies is horrifying. Rest easy -- acupuncture needles are nothing like the needles used for traditional injections. Acupuncture needles are fine and flexible, no bigger around than a human hair or piece of thread. Deftly inserted by a skilled acupuncturist, the slender



Photo by Chris Miller

needle produces little or no sensation at all. Most people are quite comfortable and feel a great sense of peace at the end of their session. If you worry about the cleanliness of needles, don't be concerned. Acupuncturists follow strict government regulations on sterilization procedures and no needles are ever reused.

Could acupuncture help a condition you may have? Who knows? But in this case you might do well to try something new... as new as something a few thousand years old can be!

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