

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture comes from ancient Chinese medicine. It has been used to treat pain in China for about 3000 years. The Chinese explanation involves Qi (pronounced Chee), an energy that flows through the body. The belief is that when this Qi is balanced (Yin and Yang), then the body is healthy. Qi flows through different lines within your body called “meridians”. With the most common form of acupuncture, an expert puts very small needles into specific areas of your body where Qi flows close to the surface of the skin.

There is some evidence that acupuncture works after operations to stop pain, after chemotherapy to stop feeling sick and vomiting, during pregnancy to stop feeling sick and after dental surgery for dental pain. It has also been used to treat headaches, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia (general muscle pain), low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and asthma.

While we are not sure exactly how it works, 3 possible explanations have been given:

- Acupuncture blocks pain from traveling in your nerves
- Acupuncture causes your body to make chemicals that prevent pain
- Acupuncture opens or closes your veins and arteries in important areas of the body

Are there different kinds of acupuncture?

The most popular acupuncture is performed by putting thin metal needles into the skin. Other forms of acupuncture include:

ACUPUNCTURE

- **Electro-acupuncture**, which again uses needles through which very small electrical currents are passed;

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Ricardo Miranda, L.Ac

- **Auriculotherapy**, which uses either needles or pressure on different spots of the ear which are trigger points for the entire body;
- **Moxibustion**, which uses heat at different spots on the body;



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- **Sonopuncture**, which uses sound waves at different spots on the body
- **Cupping**, which uses suction cups over areas such as the back or the legs to pull blood and other fluids in the area under the skin;



Pictures courtesy of Ricardo Miranda, L.Ac

- **Acupressure**, which uses pressure on different spots on the body;
- **Reflexology**, which uses pressure under the feet or the back part of the ankles.

Why use acupuncture after a stroke?

Acupuncture has been used after a stroke to treat spasticity (stiffness of muscles caused by the stroke), loss of function, loss of mobility, depression, aphasia (loss of speaking and writing skills), hemiplegia (loss of feeling and/or power to move one side of the body) and for pain reduction.

Does it work for stroke?

Experts have done some experiments to compare acupuncture with other treatments to see whether acupuncture helps people who have had a stroke.

In individuals with ACUTE stroke (< 4 weeks after stroke) 13 high quality studies and 7 fair quality studies found that acupuncture:

- Was not more helpful than other treatments for improving cognitive skills (e.g. memory, language); mood (e.g. depression); self-care skills (e.g. dressing, shopping); quality of life; physical skills (e.g. strength, range of motion, sensation, motor function of arms and legs); or mobility (e.g. balance, walking speed); but
- Was more helpful than the usual treatment for improving swallowing skills and swallowing safety.

In individuals with SUBACUTE stroke (1 month – 6 months after stroke) 1 high quality study found that acupuncture:

- Was not more helpful than pretend acupuncture for improving range of motion.

In individuals with CHRONIC stroke (> 6 months after stroke): 3 high quality studies and 1 low quality study found that acupuncture:

- Was not more helpful than pretend acupuncture for improving mood (e.g. depression); self-care skills (e.g. dressing); mobility (e.g. walking endurance); physical skills (e.g. spasticity, range of motion, strength) or pain.

What can I expect?

Most people find that having acupuncture treatment causes very little pain, if any. In most cases you feel the needle going in, but it doesn't hurt. Some people say they feel cramping, heaviness or tingling at the needle site or up the "meridian".

The acupuncturist may use other treatments once the needles are in place. This depends on his/her training.

Side effects/risks?

As with any other use of needles, sanitation is very important to not spread germs. All acupuncturists should use new, individually packaged, disposable needles. If these are not used, don't agree to treatment.

There is little risk related to acupuncture if done by a qualified professional. Side effects could include dizziness, feeling sick and feeling tired after treatment. There could also be a little bleeding at the needle site and some slight bruising. There is always a slight risk of infection when putting needles in the skin.

Who provides the treatment?

Acupuncture should be performed by a trained health professional. A variety of health professionals provide acupuncture as part of their treatment including doctors and physical therapists. Individuals known as acupuncturists only use acupuncture as their main treatment.

How many treatments?

This depends on the reason you are getting acupuncture. You should discuss the treatment plan with the acupuncturist before starting treatment. You might receive anywhere from one to 15 treatment sessions.

How much does it cost? Does insurance pay for it?

Acupuncture is not paid for by provincial insurance plans. However, it is covered by some private insurance plans. The cost for each session may vary from \$40.00 to \$90.00.

Is acupuncture for me?

Although the benefits of acupuncture have been talked about for hundreds of years, there is no strong scientific evidence that it works to reduce spasticity, loss of function, loss of mobility, depression, aphasia or pain. Yet, there are some people who say they have found it helpful.

Information on this web site is provided for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. If you have or suspect you have a medical problem, promptly contact your professional healthcare provider.