

# A Guide to Acupuncture

## **What is acupuncture?**

For more than 5,000 years, acupuncturists have treated many diseases or dysfunctions of the body by inserting fine needles into the skin at specific points. The needles stimulate these acupuncture points to normalize physiological functions, to modify or prevent the perception of pain, and to encourage the body's own healing abilities.

The classic theory supporting Traditional Chinese Medicine uses a holistic approach to treat the patient. The life force which circulates throughout the body is made up of Qi (energy) and Xue (blood) which flow through distinct meridians (pathways) in the body. When this life force is balanced and circulating properly, the body is healthy.

Energy imbalance in the meridians is thought to cause illness or pain. To correct this imbalance, the acupuncturist inserts and stimulates fine needles at acupuncture points. Often, acupressure, moxibustion, cupping, breathing techniques, exercise and nutrition are also used to restore harmonious energy balance and expedite the healing process.

## **What conditions do acupuncturists treat?**

Acupuncturists treat many conditions affecting your health. These include, but are not limited to, low back pain, sprains and strains, nausea, headaches, chronic pain and certain neurologic disorders manifesting in symptoms like numbness and tingling. Your acupuncturist or primary care physician will be able to advise you of the choices of treatment available for your specific condition.

## **What kind of training and license do acupuncturists have?**

Acupuncturists have been licensed in the United States since 1973. Although initially only three states granted licensure, today over 39 states do. Acupuncturists must complete a minimum of three to four years of acupuncture college training at the Master of Science level, and successfully pass written and clinical examinations. Some states accept the National Commission for the Certification of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) exam, which has a written and clinical section. In addition, some states require that continuing education be completed to

maintain licensure.

**What should I know about the proposed treatments?**

After reviewing your medical history, performing an examination, and developing a working diagnosis, your acupuncturist will explain the nature of your condition and his or her recommended treatment plan. The benefits and potential risks of this treatment plan will be explained to you as well as other treatment options as applicable.

**How many treatments will I need?**

Depending on the duration, severity and nature of your complaint, the number and frequency of treatments may vary. You may need only one treatment or a series of treatments for more chronic conditions. A typical acupuncture session lasts 30 – 60 minutes. You may be informed that some conditions require coordinated care with other specialists and/or your primary care physician.

**What measures are taken to require that the needles are clean and safe?**

American Specialty Health acupuncturists use only sterile, individually packaged needles that are disposed of after one use, and follow clinically-accepted “Clean Needle Technique” standards.

**How deep are the needles inserted, and do they hurt?**

The needle depth varies with the location of the acupuncture point selected, your size, age and body type. In general, needles are inserted from 1/4 to 1 inch in depth. Your treatment should not be painful. However, you may feel a dull ache, heaviness, tingling or electric sensation around the needle or even above or below the involved meridian. This temporary sensation is called “de qi.” If at any time during the treatment you feel a sensation that is intolerable, tell your acupuncturist immediately, and he or she will modify your treatment appropriately.

**How should I prepare for an acupuncture treatment?**

You should be prepared to be comfortable and relaxed for the duration of the treatment. Your acupuncturist may choose various points on your arms, legs, back, or abdomen, so wear loose-fitting clothes, and avoid wearing jewelry,

one-piece dresses or tight stockings. Since acupuncture affects your circulation, you will get the most out of a treatment by avoiding heavy meals, alcohol, coffee, or other caffeinated beverages, or participating in rigorous exercise, for about an hour before and after your treatment.

**What can I expect after treatment?**

Patients often experience dramatic results after their first treatment. In a few cases, there may be no immediate relief, but many notice their condition gradually improving over a course of treatment. Occasionally a small drop of blood or local bruise may appear at one or more acupuncture needle points after the needles are removed. The tiny drop of blood easily wipes off, while the bruise usually disappears within a few days. If you experience any long-term swelling, bleeding or redness, notify your acupuncturist immediately. If you have any questions or are uncomfortable with any part of your treatment, please talk to your acupuncturist.

**What about medications I may be taking?**

Be sure to tell your acupuncturist about any over-the-counter or prescribed medications, herbs or vitamins you may be taking. These medications or supplements will not interfere with your acupuncture treatments. Do not stop taking prescribed medications without the direction of your primary care physician. The information provided in this article is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice or health care. Always seek the advice of your physician before beginning any new treatment or fitness program or if you have questions regarding a medical condition.