

## **Acupuncture FAQ**

### **What is Acupuncture?**

Contrary to popular Western belief, acupuncture is not just a system for using needles to alleviate pain. It is a complete medical protocol focused on correcting imbalances of energy in the body. From its inception in China more than 2,500 years ago, acupuncture has been used traditionally to prevent, diagnose and treat disease, as well as to improve general health. Performed by placing very fine needles into specific points, acupuncture modifies the flow of energy (qi or chi) through the body. Sometimes heat or electrical stimulation is also applied to the acupuncture points.

Acupuncture was popularized in the States during the early 70's after President Nixon opened relations with China. At the time, a New York Times reporter, James Reston, had an appendectomy in a Chinese hospital using acupuncture as a means to decrease his post-surgical pain.

### **How Does Acupuncture Work?**

Preclinical studies have documented acupuncture's effects, but they have not been able to fully explain how acupuncture works. Modern biomedical research has found that acupuncture points are electrically and anatomically distinct areas on the body. By stimulating these special sites, it is proposed that acupuncture produces its effects through regulating the nervous system, thus aiding the activity of pain-killing biochemicals such as endorphins and immune system cells at specific sites in the body. In addition, studies have shown that acupuncture may alter brain chemistry by changing the release of neurotransmitters and neurohormones and, thus, affecting the parts of the central nervous system related to sensation and involuntary body functions, such as immune reactions and processes that regulate a person's blood pressure, blood flow, and body temperature.

Research studies in the U.S. indicate that acupuncture can help relieve chronic low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, dental pain, migraine headaches, fibromyalgia and symptoms of osteoarthritis. It has been shown to assist in the treatment of emotional pain syndromes such as post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as controlling chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting. It has also demonstrated clinical success in achieving pregnancy when used in conjunction with in-vitro fertilization.

### **Is Acupuncture Safe?**

Relatively few complications from the use of acupuncture have been reported to the FDA in light of the millions of people treated each year and the number of acupuncture needles used. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates acupuncture needles for use by licensed practitioners, requiring that needles be sterile, nontoxic, and labeled for single use by qualified practitioners only. At LifeConnections Health Center, we use only single-use, disposable, pre-sterilized needles, which prevent infectious transmissions of any kind.

The most common risks of acupuncture involve slight bruising and occasional bleeding at the site of needle insertion. A review of the international research literature revealed pneumothorax (a punctured

lung) to be the only life-threatening complication to have occurred among tens of thousands of patients over nine separate trials. No post-acupuncture infections were reported in any of the studies. Less severe adverse events include fainting, sweating, and mild dizziness.

### **What Conditions Can Acupuncture Treat?**

Because acupuncture can alter the hormonal system, immune system, as well as the central nervous system, it can affect a wide range of physiological changes. Thus, acupuncture can treat conditions as diverse as digestive disorders, gynecological issues, musculoskeletal pain, allergies, and headaches, to name a few. Acupuncture can also moderate the stress response, improving psychological conditions such as anxiety and depression. Here is a list of some of the most common conditions treated:

- **Digestive disorders:** abdominal pain, indigestion, acid reflux, constipation, diarrhea.
- **Respiratory disorders:** sinusitis, sore throat, bronchitis, asthma, allergies
- **Neurological and muscular disorders:** headaches, migraines, facial paralysis, trigeminal neuralgia, neck pain, back pain, muscle pain or cramping, frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, various forms of tendonitis, sciatica, osteoarthritis, TMJ, repetitive stress injuries such as carpal tunnel
- **Urinary, menstrual, and reproductive problems:** infertility, morning sickness, PMS, painful menstrual cramps or irregular periods, chronic vaginal or UTI infections
- **Miscellaneous:** stress reduction, addiction control, smoking cessation, cancer support, chronic fatigue or fibromyalgia

### **Does Acupuncture Hurt?**

When people try acupuncture for the first time, they're typically surprised by how much it *doesn't* hurt. One reason is that acupuncture needles are 25-50 times thinner than a hypodermic needle. While some people feel nothing at all; others experience a brief moment of discomfort as the needle penetrates the skin that can be followed by a mild sensation of cramping, tingling, numbness, traveling warmth, or heaviness. Most people find the experience extremely relaxing and even fall asleep for the duration of the treatment.

### **Is Acupuncture Safe During Pregnancy?**

Yes. Many patients find great relief for pregnancy related issues such as morning sickness, low back pain, sciatica, carpal tunnel syndrome, etc. Acupuncture has also been traditionally used to induce labor.

Please let your practitioner know if you are pregnant or may be pregnant as there are certain acupuncture points that are avoided during pregnancy.

(Information on this page from [nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/introduction.htm](http://nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/introduction.htm) and <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART03065/Acupuncture.html>)