

How does acupuncture work?

The answer is: No one knows for sure. The ancient Chinese theory is that there are meridians throughout the body where "Qi", or energy, flows. If there is a block in the meridian, disease and pain result. By inserting an acupuncture needle in the blocked point, the flow of Qi, and therefore health, is restored.

Western medicine is just beginning to substantiate that indeed, acupuncture does have effects that cannot be explained by what we currently know about human physiology. When performing a "functional MRI" and needling points in the foot known to affect the eyes, the MRI shows activity in the visual part of the cortex of the brain. Many people believe acupuncture is a biochemical process -- needling affects the nerve synapses, and therefore the neurotransmitters that transmit information to the brain. Acupuncture points can be found by measuring the electrical resistance on the skin.

Even though we can't yet entirely explain exactly how acupuncture works, 5000 years of needling acupuncture points has resulted in a vast body of knowledge regarding the effects from needling each of the over 400 acupuncture points.

The first visit includes a comprehensive medical history interview and a full treatment, which takes about 1.5 hours. All of your symptoms are discussed, even those you may think are unrelated. I then develop a preliminary **Chinese Medicine Diagnosis**, which determines acupuncture point selection. Before your second appointment, I go through your medical history and develop a more detailed diagnosis and treatment plan (about another ½ hour). Subsequent sessions last 50-60 minutes and consist of a brief discussion about the effects of the last treatment, additional recommendations, and a treatment for the present concerns. It is best to focus on a few priorities at a time rather than jump from treating one issue to another at each appointment, though I will also attempt to select points that treat multiple concerns.

Needles

Acupuncture needles are thin, like a hair. Usually you will either feel no sensation, or just a sensation that the needle was inserted. Occasionally, if the needle goes in a hair follicle or blood vessel, there will be a small amount of stinging, which usually goes away almost immediately. If the stinging does not go away, I move the needle to a slightly different location, or leave it out. I use only disposable acupuncture needles. I usually use 14-20 needles per treatment, and needles are typically left in between 20-35 minutes.

How Long Will Therapy Take?

A common question I get in the beginning of therapy is "How long will it take"? My general rule of thumb is that longer the condition has been going on and the more medical conditions (of any kind) the patient has, the more muscles and organ systems will be involved, and the treatment will be more complicated and take longer. If a patient is perfectly healthy and has only a recent minor injury, I may only see them a few times. Patient compliance is a factor -- whether they follow my recommendations and participate in their healing by doing the self-help techniques (patients that follow my recommendations get better about five times faster than those who don't). I can usually give the patient a pretty good indication of how many treatments they may need by the end of the second or third treatment, based on their medical

condition, their compliance to date, and how much they have improved (or not) within the first few weeks.

Please don't expect that you will be completely well in one appointment - this is a process, and not a one-time treatment for most patients. The acupuncture itself is only part of the treatment – I may recommend dietary changes (if you are deficient in a nutrient, acupuncture is not going to replace that nutrient), lifestyle changes, furniture/equipment changes, herbs/homeopathics, and/or self-help techniques as part of your course of treatment. All of this can't be done in just one appointment. For some patients, it is desirable to relax muscles slowly over time, to avoid increasing pain when muscles that are weak (due to splinting by the tight ones) start taking their share of the load again. For most patients, I recommend starting with once per week, and then as a patient improves I start decreasing the treatment frequency. If you have a disc problem or chronic fatigue syndrome, twice per week may be recommended initially. Some conditions will take longer to treat, such as gynecological problems.

Sometimes one or more other issues may need to be resolved either first or simultaneously, in order to effectively treat your primary concern. For example, if a patient isn't sleeping well or has diarrhea, I may need to treat those also in order to relieve their pain completely. I may recommend supplements if I suspect a nutritional deficiency.

Please plan on giving acupuncture three to five treatments before you decide whether it is working or not. Sometimes patients forget to put everything on their medical history form that is significant, and it may take some treatments for them to remember that information, or realize it is significant (i.e. all the exercises they are doing, or foods/beverages that are significant). Sometimes I will ask you to pay attention to certain patterns in the coming weeks, like what you were doing just prior to the symptoms getting re-aggravated, so I can discern what external factors are causing your health issues.

Some patients get a little worse before they get better, and if I think that will happen, I will let them know, but I can't always anticipate that. *Please don't stop coming if you feel worse after a treatment!* Sometimes getting a little worse, or no change, is good diagnostic information in itself. *It could be good information about what is aggravating your problem.* Sometimes patients will start to feel better and overdo it, but that does not mean the treatment made you worse or didn't work. Sometimes it takes trying different treatments to get to the root of the problem. If someone hasn't improved *at all* in three to five treatments, I will send that patient to get imaging (MRI, X-ray, CT scan) and/or blood work, or other diagnostic testing through another type of provider. Once that is done, I can decide if acupuncture is still appropriate, and how to change subsequent treatments based on the test results. If I think you need to seek care from another type of provider at that point, I will make a recommendation.

Sometimes a patient will come in and tell me "there was no change," but upon further questioning, the condition really has improved, it's just that it's not all gone. Any change for the better in symptom intensity, frequency, duration of symptoms, amount of affected area, and a shorter length of time before the symptoms decrease once re-aggravated, are *all* signs of improvement. It also makes it easier for you to discern the pertinent external aggravating factors when you don't have symptoms 100% of the time any more. This does not mean you

won't relapse, particularly if you overdo it, but what is significant is how you felt within the first few days of the treatment, and I will ask you for that information at the start of each session. Ideally you will get relief for longer and longer periods of time if you don't reaggravate it.

Please let me know if you have additional questions. I look forward to working with you to improve your health and quality of life!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie DeLaune, LAc".

Valerie DeLaune, LAc