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Acupuncture and physiotherapy: a happy marriage of new and ancient medicine

By Shaleen Bhagat

Acupuncture is a therapeutic method used to encourage healing, relieve pain, and improve function of the body. Acupuncture is safe, effective, and often used as an alternative to medication or in some cases even surgery. Acupuncture involves the insertion of fine hair-like needles into the body to stimulate the flow of Qi. Before we go further, let us define a few terms:

Qi (pronounced "chee"), is a Chinese term for energy or the life force. Qi exists in everyone and controls all aspects of life. It is believed to regulate a person's physical, mental, and emotional balance and is governed by two opposing forces, the Yang (positive forces) and the Yin (negative forces).

Meridian, is a term for each of the 20 pathways that form a network of energy channels throughout the body. Along these meridians lie most of the acupuncture points.

The general theory of acupuncture is based on the premise that good health is achieved when the body is in a balanced state, ie the Yin and Yang energies are equal in the body. This happens when the Qi is able to flow freely through the meridians. If the Qi or the energy flow becomes blocked, weakened, or even stagnated, an imbalance in the body occurs. This is believed, in Chinese Medicine, to be responsible for disease and ill physical health. Stimulation of very specific acupuncture points can unblock, strengthen, and move the Qi to effectively rebalance the energy system and restore health.

Although acupuncture has proven successful for thousands of years in China without the benefit of modern medical knowledge, it is only in the last 30 years that medicine and science in North America and Europe have begun to study its effectiveness. Research has shown that acupuncture stimulates the body to produce its own natural pain relieving chemicals called *endorphins*. Endorphins block pathways that send pain messages from the body to the brain, resulting in pain relief. Acupuncture has also been shown to release other biochemicals that boost the immune system, and regulate blood pressure, circulation, and body temperature--all of which can help the body respond to an injury.

I have had patients ask me if acupuncture is safe. I tell them that if the needles are properly sterilized (I use, and recommend, sterile disposable needles) and the practitioner is well trained, then there should be almost no complications. Most people cannot feel the fine needles when they are inserted. Often, a mild toothache-like sensation is common once the needle is in the correct spot. Some people are energized by the treatment, while others say they feel relaxed. Acupuncture is not recommended in pregnancy.

Acupuncture is best known for the control of pain, both acute and chronic. The World Health Organization has identified the benefits of acupuncture for the treatment of a wide variety of problems; these include, but are certainly not limited to, headaches, osteoarthritis, low back pain, sciatica, frozen shoulder, tennis elbows, cervical problems, neuralgias, and chronic pain.

Many physiotherapists with their strong knowledge in anatomy and physiology have taken advanced training in acupuncture and can offer this service. Physiotherapists are able to take a detailed history of the problem and then conduct a series of tests to determine the cause of the problem. Along with using "hands on" manual therapy and exercise to help resolve the problem, a physiotherapist trained in acupuncture may use acupuncture to assist in your recovery. I have been using acupuncture for many years now and found it to be an excellent complement to my physiotherapy treatments.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com

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