

Acupuncture and Back Pain

Back pain is one of the most prevalent reasons people seek health care. Millions of working days and countless hours of activity and fun are lost each year due to back pain. Common Causes of Back Pain Treated with Acupuncture One of the top causes of back pain are sprains (over stretching one or more of the ligaments in the back) and strains (a rip or tear in the muscle caused by sudden force). This can happen from an injury, poor posture, or improper lifting. Another source of back pain comes from a herniated disc, which is a disc that bulges out from its place between two vertebrae. Sciatica is another common form of back pain. Sciatica is a term used to describe pain that extends down into the buttocks and leg, which comes from an irritation of a larger nerve in the lumbar spine, called the sciatic nerve. Sciatica can accompany sprains, strains, herniated discs as well as back pain emanating from other sources.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Patterns of Back Pain Traditional Chinese Medicine's (TCM) vocabulary is differentiated patterns of back pain. Common TCM patterns includes:

- * Pain that comes from deficiency;
- * Pain that comes from "Qi" (vital life energy in the body, pronounced "chee") and blood stagnation;
- * And pain due to cold damp obstruction

Pain that results from deficiency is usually dull, chronic, and

improves with rest. It is more common in middle aged and elderly people. Pain from stagnation is more severe and stabbing in nature. There is stiffness and tightness in the muscles and it worsens with rest. Often this type is seen in occurrences of acute sprains and strains. It can reoccur chronically, thereby indicating an underlying deficiency. Pain form cold damp obstruction is worse in the morning, exacerbated by cold and damp weather. It improves with heat and may be accompanied by numbness, swelling and a sense of heaviness.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as Treatment for Back Pain

TCM works to restore harmony and energetic balance to the body, which stimulates natural healing and promotes health. Acupuncture is one of the primary modalities used and treatment is individual to each patient. When your practitioner treats your back pain with Acupuncture, both local (at site of pain) and distal (away from the area of pain) needles can be used to help resolve the problem. Distal points are very important, especially in acute pain. Often, needles can be placed in areas other than the back and you can get excellent and quick relief. There are many local points on the back and often a practitioner will palpate your body to find the most sensitive spots and needle those. Other adjuncts to treatment might include : electrical stimulation of points and cupping. Generally, it is advisable to the pain diminishes. Herbs can also be helpful in moving blood and reducing inflammation as well as strengthening a deficient condition. In a Swedish hospital study with patients who experienced chronic low back pain, doctors concluded that

acupuncture provide long-term pain relief. They also observed improvement in activity levels, better sleep, and consumption of significantly fewer analgesics for the acupuncture group as compared with the group receiving a placebo treatment. Acupuncture continues to gain popularity in this country because it is an effective treatment of acute and chronic backache. Acute pain can often be cleared up in a few sessions. More treatments may be needed if there is an underlying deficiency or reoccurring problem, or sciatica.