

What is Acupuncture?

Classical Eastern Explanation Acupuncture is one of oldest, professional, continually practiced medicine in the world. It uses the insertion of fine needles into specific points, which are located in a specific area on the surface of the skin. Needles have the ability to alter various biochemical and physiological conditions in order to achieve the desire effect. The classical Eastern explanation for how Acupuncture works is based on ancient Chinese theories of the flow of ed Chee).

Qi is energy which circulates within the body. It is the animating force that provides you with the ability to talk, walk, think, metabolize, dream, and love. Qi also protects you from illness, pain and discomfort, keeping you strong and healthy. Qi flows through specific pathways called Meridians. There are fourteen main meridian pathways traveling throughout your body, each on is connected to an organ system. Like a river it floats back and forth transporting and nourishing, they bring life-giving Qi to nourish every cell, organ, and tissue in your body.

Physical or emotional strain, trauma, stress, lack of exercise, overexertion, seasonal changes, poor diet, accidents, excessive activity, or weakness can all lead to blockages of Qi. If Qi is disturbed and if your body cannot bounce back returning to balance and health, soon the disruption or imbalance can cause the body to turn into a state of weakness, illness, pain or even disease can begin to set in.

In order to restrain Qi, an acupuncturist would place a fine,

sterile disposable needle at specific outpoints along your meridian pathways. The safe and painless needle insertion of the needle unblocks the damaging or obstruction of your meridians. Releasing this blockage allows Qi to freely circulate, eliminating pain and restoring the body's ability to heal itself.

Other more common various treatment methods used by acupuncturists to maintain health are: **Moxibustion (or Moxa)** which uses the dried leaf of *Artemisia Vulgaris* herb rolled into sticks or cones placed on the ends of needles, then burned as a warming therapy during treatment.

Electro-acupuncture is a method where acupuncture points are stimulated by using a safe, gentle electrical current.

Acupressure and Tuina - a massage technique which stimulates the meridians, facilitating the flow of Qi. Cupping - creating a vacuum using glass or bamboo cups to increase warmth and circulation.

Western Medical Explanation When an Acupuncture needle is inserted into a traditional acupuncture point, certain nerve fibers are stimulated, which results in a nerve impulse being sent to the spinal cord. Here, endorphogenic cells are stimulated to release endorphins (brain chemicals) such as enkephalin and dynorphin. These substances provide local inhibition (blocking) of the incoming pain signal.

In addition to causing effects in the spinal cord, the nerve impulse produced by the acupuncture needle is also transmitted to the periaqueductal gray area of the mid-brain, where enkephalin is released. Enkephalin, in turn, brings about the

release of monoamine neurotransmitters serotonin and norepinephrine in the spinal cord. These monoamines play a role in suppressing the transmission of the pain impulse. In addition to its role in reducing pain, serotonin is involved in producing an antidepressant effect in the brain. In fact, many of the newest antidepressant drugs work by prolonging the effect of serotonin in the brain. A third effect brought about by acupuncture is the release of beta-endorphin and Adrenocorticotrophic Hormone (ACTH) from the pituitary gland into the bloodstream system-wide pain relief, remote from the area where the acupuncture needle was inserted. ACTH, in turn, activates the adrenal gland to release cortisol into the bloodstream. Cortisol is a naturally occurring steroid substance that has anti-inflammatory properties. The net result of these 3 areas being stimulated is an inhibition of the incoming pain sensation locally, a general, morphinelike, pain-relieving effect throughout the body, an anti-inflammatory effect, and a general sense of improved well-being. Depending on which acupuncture points are chosen, whether they are near the painful site or far away, determines which of the 3 pathways mentioned are primarily activated. Placing needles near the painful site brings about a more intense pain relief, because it activates all 3 centers (spinal cord, mid-brain, and pituitary gland). Local needling also maximizes inhibition of the incoming pain signal at the segmental region of the spinal cord. Needling acupuncture points distant to the painful area predominantly affects the mid-brain and pituitary gland. In general, a combination of local and distant acupuncture points are used together during a treatment, in order to maximize the effects at all 3 centers.