

Explanation of Pain and Treatments in Acupuncture

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Acupuncture gained acceptance as an alternative to traditional Western medicine for pain relief and for treating a variety of other health conditions in 1970's. The law of acupuncture was established around the time and remained the same until today. Growing numbers have sought out acupuncturists for chronic health problems when conventional medicine either hasn't worked nor has answers. Today, About 60 percent of baby boomers¹ (78 million Americans) have been diagnosed with at least one chronic medical condition. Some common chronic conditions are arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. Studies show that baby boomers, who suffer from muscle and bone pain, and other ranges of problems, are giving acupuncture a try to lessen their symptoms.

How Traditional Chinese Medicine defines and explains the cause of pain. Pain is stagnation, blockage or stoppage. This is how classic books from ancient explained pain: 'Where there is stoppage, there is pain'. Besides chief observable signs of pain, sensations of oppression, tightness, heaviness, soreness, swollen, numbness and inability to move are all signs of stagnation.

Let us focus on musculoskeletal pain here. Pain is usually the result from either trauma/injury or unknown causes. How and why does it happen when there are no obvious signs of injury or trauma? It is caused by invasion of pathogen into the meridians/channels² in Traditional Chinese Medicine. These pathogens usually include wind, damp, cold or trauma from exterior. Wind, damp, cold are environmental factors that influences my body. Let me explain this by using an example of common cold. We often get cold because of sudden change of temperature or body exhausting. We often experience throat, nasal symptoms, fever, fatigue, feeling cold, body arch and many more. These are the manifestation of pathogen invade our respiratory system. When exterior pathogen enters the body and remains in soft tissues (muscle, tendon and ligaments), obvious signs are pain, soreness, heaviness, tightness and lose of mobility. The normal cycle of circulation is disturbed; therefore, accumulation/stagnation built up. Fluid is the name we use in Traditional Chinese Medicine. These fluids include qi, blood, fluid, phlegm and meridians/channels. Prolonged condition progress the stage of blockage causing the tear of soft tissue. As a result, causes pain. Some people experience reducing of pain after intake food or protein. Why? Foods are fuels for our body which can be transformed into heat. Heat expels the cold damp in the pain area; therefore, pain reduces temporally. Then, why does the pain come back? As I mentioned before the normal cycle of circulation was already disturbed because of the pathogen invasion. The temporal relief induces rebellious flow of circulation/energy. It can easily cause stagnation and induce pain. This is the result of recurrent pain. It also explains the reason pain persists without recuperating. The principle treatment of Acupuncture is to restore the normal flow, improve qi and invigorate blood circulation; and therefore, relief pain.

¹ Baby Boomers are people born during the demographic post-World War II between 1946 and 1964. Today there are proximately 78 million Americans.

² Meridians and channels are pathways and networks in body.

Let's talk about musculoskeletal pain induced by trauma/injury. Clinically there are two common types in Traditional Chinese Medicine: bone injury and soft tissue injury. Bone injury means any injuries caused by external force, changes in body position, extreme contraction in muscles or overuse reasons. Misalignment, dislocation, subluxation of joints and facets, small synovial incarceration, facet syndrome, fractures with & without any disruption of anatomical position are some of the examples. Soft tissue injuries are any muscle/tendon/ligament changes in anatomical position that effect body function or harmony in the body. The symptoms can be spondylolisthesis, spasm, pain, range of motion restriction, stiffness, numbness, loss of sensation, radiation pain in areas and etc. We know bone and soft tissue are interdependent. Bones are framework of the body. Soft tissues contribute to stabilize, support and regulate. By using an example in western medicine can explain this matter. After a fracture and healing of the bone, rehabilitation exercises are to be followed to regain normal activity and function. To treat pain, many people understand acupuncture treatment is a trigger point treatment. This is only a small part of the treatments.

Trigger point treatment is a technique that releases the spasm/knots in the local area. Cupping, GuaSha, acupressure/tuina, retraction and realignment treatments, wax, heat treatment, moxabustion, external herbal wash, external herbal oils, creams, plasters, internal herbal formulas, food therapy, different techniques of acupuncture, and self-care instructions are some other modalities in acupuncture. As practitioners, we must carefully exam, diagnose, foresee and treat base on the individuals. Age, medical history, life style and body type, and others are all essential. For example: Neck pain can be caused primary by neck self or resulted from/or combined with other diseases/disorders. Within primary cervical spondylosis/ neck pain, there are five types. Some are suitable for retraction/realignment/acupressure treatments, others may not.

In addition, acupuncture is used as an adjunct treatment or an acceptable alternative to treat an ever-growing list of conditions: addiction, stroke, headache, fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, asthma, infertility, women's health, dental pain, allergy, mental health, autism and side effects from cancer treatment.

Here are three main reasons why people consider acupuncture treatments for their health: efficacy, economic reasons and environment. The most obvious reason is that it works well fewer side-effects. There is economic reason to consider acupuncture. If you average the total cost of obtaining a prescription for chronic conditions (including routine doctor visits, blood tests for liver and kidney damage, and the prescription) the average weekly expense is often higher than that of acupuncture. Replacing drugs with non-toxic acupuncture will reduce the amount of stress you place on your internal and external environments.

"The applications for acupuncture are endless ... people use it for sports injuries, for their emotional well-being, for everything," Peter Wayne, PhD, director of research at the New England School of Acupuncture, tells WebMD.

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