



Me and my therapy

Can sticking needles into the body aid health?
Rhiannon Griffiths on the power of acupuncture

WHAT IS ACUPUNCTURE?

Acupuncture focuses on harmonising the mind, body and emotions. It aims to diagnose the root cause of illness, and to address it by balancing internal energy (known as qi). Ultra-fine needles are inserted into specific points (acupoints) of the body to restore proper functioning of organs, body systems and substances.

WHAT ARE ITS ORIGINS?

It is a form of ancient Chinese medicine based on more than 2,000 years of tradition. The concept of balancing yin and yang can be traced back to the Shang dynasty, 1600-1100BC in China.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Acupuncture works with energy channels, known as meridians, that flow from the top of the head to the tips of the toes. The needles regulate and harmonise qi within these channels, restoring balance, health and wellbeing. In scientific terms, acupuncture has been shown to stimulate the release

of endorphins (the body's natural happy hormones) and oxytocin (the calm and contented hormone).

WHY DID YOU TAKE IT UP?

As a massive needle phobic, I was adamant I would never try acupuncture. However, as a teenager, after a month-long migraine that conventional medicine did not help, I tried it as a last resort, and was converted. It kept the migraines at bay, but also helped my emotions and overall health. While working as a media planner in London, I realised I was in the wrong profession, and left to retrain as an acupuncturist.

WHAT DID YOUR TRAINING INVOLVE?

I went to the College of Integrated Chinese Medicine in Reading, gaining a BSc in acupuncture.

WHAT HAPPENS IN A SESSION?

The initial consultation is around two hours, and questions include symptoms, medical and family history, diet, digestive system, sleeping patterns and emotional state. Additional diagnostic tools include pulse-taking and looking at the tongue. Subsequent treatments usually last around one hour; when needles may be left in for 10 to 15 minutes.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

It is hard to describe the sensation unless you have experienced it. Many people fear needles and expect it to be painful, but some people don't feel the needles at all, as they are very thin – only the diameter of a human hair. What we are really interested in is what patients feel after insertion, when the needle

connects with the qi or energy within the channel. This is called deqi, and can feel like a dull ache, an electrical impulse, or a drawing sensation. This tells us the needles are doing what we want them to.

HOW MANY SESSIONS ARE NEEDED?

It varies. Some change is usually felt after three to six sessions, though occasionally only one or two treatments are needed. Most patients reach a level of health where they have less frequent, but regular, 'top-ups' to maintain a balanced state and keep symptoms at bay.

WHAT CONDITIONS IS IT BEST FOR?

Acupuncture is good for physical conditions, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) recommends it for lower-back pain, migraine and tension headaches. It is also brilliant for emotional issues such as stress and depression.

WHAT DO YOU MOST LIKE ABOUT YOUR WORK?

I love applying Chinese medicine to modern living. It is such a privilege to hear about my patients' lives, to support them, and to help them feel better.

Press it

Acupressure uses the same points as acupuncture, but with firm finger massages rather than needles.

For a headache – Massage the fleshy pad between the thumb and forefinger firmly. Avoid if pregnant.

For a cough – Find the dip at the top of the breastbone, between the two inner ends of the collar-bones. Press firmly inward and down until the wheeze, tickle or cough eases.

TRY IT FOR YOURSELF...

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