

Psychotherapy Guidebook

ACUPUNCTURE

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e-Book 2015 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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Acupuncture

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DEFINITION

Acupuncture is a treatment used to prevent disease and promote better balance of energy flow throughout the body. It may be employed to control or eliminate pain disorders. The nature of the therapy is the insertion of fine 28- to 32-gauge stainless steel needles into specific points, or loci, on the human body. The points are referred to as acupuncture points and they are found on specific channels or pathways called meridians. The meridians are fine, invisible lines that are interconnected and carry energy from the extremities to the trunk and head, and back again to the extremities. The energy coursing through these channels is referred to as Chi or Prana. These energy channels also have an internal circulation that interconnects with the various viscera or organs of the body.

HISTORY

Acupuncture is a Chinese healing art dating back approximately 5,000 years. It is stressed that in order for there to be optimal health there must be a balance between the internal and external environments of man. The goal is

to bring about harmony of mind and body. Modern Acupuncture in China reflects the interrelationship between the peripheral nerves and meridians. Textbook illustrations published for the West often show the acupuncture points printed over these large nerves. There is controversy between traditionalists and nontraditionalists as to whether Acupuncture deals directly with the nervous system or whether it deals with an entirely different energy circuit not visible to the naked eye. Regardless of which theory is correct, there is no dispute that reactions and changes (noted below) do occur with the insertion of needles into an individual.

European doctors have actively practiced Acupuncture for nearly two centuries. The French school in particular has developed a most sophisticated method of measuring the energy within the meridians through the use of highly technical electronic devices. Under the work of Dr. Nogier, interesting discoveries in ear acupuncture have been made. The entire human form is represented on the ear, and specific points have been shown to reasonably treat various conditions.

TECHNIQUE

The goal of the Acupuncture treatment is to select an appropriate number of needles and insert them into specific acupuncture points along the meridians. The needles unblock the energy that has become obstructed along

the pathway, thus correcting the imbalance and permitting an even flow of Chi circulation. Disease in Eastern medicine is believed due to an obstruction or blockage of energy. Ultimately, what may cause a blockage might be stress from emotions, poor posture, trauma, or inadequate nutrition. During the course of a treatment series, an individual usually experiences a change in his nervous system tone. There are subjective experiences where one reports feeling more relaxed, calmer, and at ease. Individuals usually also discover they can sleep better, have better functioning of their gastrointestinal tract, and experience a warming up of previously reported cold extremities.

APPLICATIONS

Acupuncture functions best when treating reversible or physiological illness. Disorders of this type are consistent with an increase or decrease in the tone of smooth and skeletal muscles. Functional illnesses may be cervical and lumbar spasm (neck and low-back pain), all varieties of headaches, conditions of nausea, constipation, hypermotility of the bowel, and asthma. Arthritis of the osteo and rheumatoid varieties are also treatable. According to The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine, Acupuncture is specifically recommended for diseases of numbness and spasm.

From a neurophysiological point of view, it appears that Acupuncture is dealing with a series of both simple and very complicated nerve reflexes. The

reactions often seen during a treatment are the softening of tense muscles, perspiration, lowering of blood pressure, and a state of “wakeful sleep.”

From a neuroanatomical point of view, with ear acupuncture it is the vagus nerve that innervates a large portion of the ear. This powerful cranial nerve also sends branches to the heart, stomach, intestines, lungs, pancreas, and gall bladder. Thus stimulation of ear points can have profound effects on the physical body.

The goal of Acupuncture is to bring about harmony of mind and body. Acupuncture can function as that vehicle by which the practitioner can serve as a true healer.