

# ACUPUNCTURE

## What is acupuncture?

- Acupuncture, as practised by members of the British Acupuncture Council (BACc), is a tried and tested system of traditional medicine which has been used in China and other far eastern cultures for thousands of years to restore, promote and maintain good health. Acupuncture is also used to relieve acute symptoms such as back pain, arthritic pain, IBS, sciatica, hay fever, severe headaches, menopause, musculo-skeletal, and PMS.
- Acupuncture predates contemporary western medical science by thousands of years. It has been developed, tested, researched and refined over centuries to give a complex and detailed understanding of both the body's energetic balance and its physical functions.
- Because of its cultural and historical roots, the language used by acupuncturists can sound philosophical to western ears, but acupuncture is just as logical and empirical as any other system of healthcare.
- Acupuncture focuses on all factors that contribute to disease and not just the presenting symptoms. Because every patient is unique, two people with the same western diagnosis will have different acupuncture treatment plans because the pathology of their illness is different.
- BACc registered acupuncturists are trained to observe and interpret subtle signs and physical changes in order to identify the precise nature of imbalance. They design a treatment plan for each individual using selected acupuncture points to relieve both the immediate symptoms and the underlying root cause of the problem.

- Traditional acupuncture's benefits are widely acknowledged around the world and in the past decade acupuncture has begun to feature more prominently in mainstream healthcare in the UK.

### How does acupuncture work?

- Acupuncture's underlying principle is that all the body's functions are inter-dependent and connected by the flow of 'qi' (vital energy) around the body. Illness and pain – whether physical or emotional - occur when the flow of qi is impaired.
- The flow of qi can be disturbed by any number of emotional and physical causes including poor nutrition, stress, infection, old age, physical injury, and emotional trauma such as anxiety, anger or grief.
- Having diagnosed the nature and cause of the imbalance, a BAcC registered acupuncturist will design an individual treatment plan for the patient.
- Treatment is aimed at resolving the root cause of a condition as well as relieving symptoms. This approach leads to a more permanent resolution of a patient's problems.
- By inserting ultra-fine, sterile disposable needles into carefully selected acupuncture points on the body the acupuncturist's intention is to regulate qi, stimulate the body's own healing response and restore its natural balance. The needles act like 'switches' that affect the flow of qi through the web of acupuncture channels (or energy meridians that cover and connect across the whole body).
- The exact biomedical mechanism is not yet fully understood but scientists suggest acupuncture stimulates the nervous system to influence the production of hormones and neurotransmitters resulting in biochemical changes that activate the body's natural healing ability.

### What are the benefits of acupuncture?

- Acupuncture can be very effective for conditions that don't respond well to conventional medicine such as back pain and sciatica, arthritic pain, dental pain, hay fever, IBS, menopause, musculo-skeletal, nausea, PMS, and severe headaches.
- Acupuncture is very effective at helping relieve acute conditions such as musculo-skeletal pain from injury, headaches, and nausea.
- Many people have regular 'top-up' sessions of acupuncture which act as preventative healthcare by improving and maintaining overall health and wellbeing.
- Acupuncture can be safely combined with western medicine to benefit patients with a range of conditions and reduce the burden on the NHS:
  - In recent years controlled trials have established the benefits of acupuncture for a number of conditions including arthritis of the knee and hip, neck pain, migraine, and chronic back pain.
  - The Cochrane review has also found acupuncture to be beneficial for vomiting, nausea, back and neck pain, headaches, and assisted conception.
  - In May 2009 NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) issued guidelines recommending that acupuncture be made available on the NHS for chronic lower back pain.
  - News of clinical studies conducted in China suggest that acupuncture effectively treats a much wider range of conditions, but huge databases of research remain largely inaccessible outside the Far East.

## The diagnostic process

- BAcC registered acupuncturists are highly trained to observe, read and understand subtle signs in the patient in order to reach a diagnosis. They are also trained in relevant aspects of western medicine including anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, pathology and aetiology. In addition, all BAcC registered acupuncturists are trained to recognise in their patients warning signs known as 'red flags'. Red flags may indicate the presence of a life-threatening condition and such patients are

immediately referred on to other healthcare practitioners for tests and treatment where appropriate.

- Acupuncture's individual approach means that if a patient presents with a headache, for example, the acupuncturist will apply different diagnostic techniques to identify the root cause of the problem. The overall diagnosis is further refined through continual cross-referencing during the first treatment and all subsequent treatments as the patient's body responds to treatment.
- The main diagnostic techniques are observation, questioning and palpation:
  - observation: a BAcC registered acupuncturist will note everything from posture and how a person moves, to their voice, eyes, nails and complexion
  - questioning: at the first consultation a full medical history is taken to gain an overall picture of an individual's physical, mental and emotional condition, lifestyle, diet and how the illness is affecting their quality of life. With headaches, for example, because different kinds of pain relate to different types of imbalance, the acupuncturist will ask about the exact nature of the pain and where in the head it is felt
  - pulse diagnosis: an acupuncturist will read up to 28 different pulse qualities on both wrists. By assessing the strength, depth, rhythm and rate of the pulse, a practitioner can identify different types of disharmony and imbalance within the body
  - tongue diagnosis: the colour, coating, shape, size, moisture and movement of the tongue are all examined. The tongue is a naked muscle, subject to the same metabolic, circulatory and interior forces as other muscles within the body and provides a non-invasive way of assessing the body's internal state of health
  - palpation: an acupuncturist might also palpate, or examine through touch, relevant parts of the body to assess muscular tension and locate painful areas or masses.

## How does acupuncture differ from medical acupuncture?

These are two completely different therapies.

- Traditional acupuncture is a stand-alone system which uses diagnostic techniques and treatment methods based on the principles of oriental medicine. As well as relieving immediate symptoms, acupuncture addresses the underlying causes of illness and promotes ongoing physical health and emotional wellbeing. It restores the overall health of the person at the same time as treating their primary condition.
- BAcC registered acupuncturists are trained to:
  - read subtle signs in the body to understand the precise cause of any collection of physical symptoms
  - know relevant western medicine including anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, pathology and aetiology
  - know the location and functions of 360+ acupuncture points on the body
  - select the most appropriate points prescription for each individual patient
  - treat both the underlying cause of an illness as well as relieve immediate physical symptoms
  - recognise the 'red flags' that indicate cancer, cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and other life-threatening illnesses, and refer those patients to other healthcare practitioners for tests and treatment where appropriate.
- Medical acupuncture is a recent development used by doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists, physiotherapists, osteopaths and chiropractors. Sometimes called 'dry needling', in this version of acupuncture a very small number of acupuncture points are used to relieve immediate physical symptoms. Dry needling is used as an adjunct to the main therapeutic technique and within the framework of a western medical diagnosis. Unlike traditional

acupuncture it does not seek to regulate qi or address the underlying imbalance that caused the symptoms to arise.

## Becoming an acupuncturist

- Traditional acupuncture is a profession and BAAC registered acupuncturists study for a minimum of three years to degree level on courses accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) (see point below).
- There are currently ten colleges and higher education institutions in the UK that run courses accredited by the BAAB.
- Most BAAB accredited courses award either BSc (Hons) or BA (Hons) degrees. Courses involve at least three years study (equivalent to 3,600 hours) of acupuncture, Chinese medicine, diagnostic techniques, consulting skills, as well as relevant western medicine including anatomy, pathology, physiology, **pharmacology**, emergency first aid and how to recognise 'red flags' indicating life-threatening medical conditions. Practitioners using acupuncture who are not members of BAAC may have less supervised clinical practice and study far less western medicine - on non-accredited courses, often with a maximum of 1,800 hours as opposed to the 3,600 hours for BAAC members.
- All BAAB accredited courses require university or college attendance for lectures, tutorials, seminars and supervised clinical practice. They include a considerable amount of home study as well as clinical hours treating patients under supervision in a teaching clinic. Full-time study lasts at least three years.
- Many acupuncturists travel to China to gain practical experience of acupuncture within a modern hospital setting. Others go on to study Chinese herbal medicine and Chinese therapeutic massage (tuina) in order to expand their practice.
- Once qualified, BAAC registered acupuncturists are required to maintain their skills and knowledge through individualised continuing professional development (CPD).

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) was formed in 1995. With around 3,000 qualified members it represents the largest body of professional acupuncturists in the UK and guarantees excellence in the following areas:

- training: entry to the profession is at three-year undergraduate degree level training (or equivalent) of 3,600 hours
- safe practice: standards are drawn up in consultation with internationally renowned experts and all BAcC members agree to adhere to the Council's Code of Safe Practice
- professional conduct: all BAcC members agree to adhere to strict codes of ethics and professional conduct.
- insurance: BAcC membership carries full medical malpractice and public/products liability insurance cover.
- up-to-date practice skills: all members sign up to a programme of individualised continuing professional development.

Over the past decade the British Acupuncture Council has been a key player in driving the move towards the statutory regulation of acupuncture. Until regulation is enacted, the BAcC continues in its commitment to protect- both the public and its members by ensuring high standards of training, continuing education, and safe practice.

To find a qualified acupuncturist, contact the British Acupuncture Council on 020 8735 0400 or visit [www.acupuncture.org.uk](http://www.acupuncture.org.uk)