

Acupuncture

For centuries, those suffering from medical ailments sought relief from Chinese acupuncture. For many years, western medicine shied away from acceptance of acupuncture, as there were very few scientific studies available that either supported or refuted its effectiveness.

However, over the past couple decades there has been a shift in the medical community along with insurance agencies. The World Health Organization, along with the American National Institute of Health, has even endorsed the benefits of acupuncture.

More rigorous scientific studies of late have been able to support the mechanism by which acupuncture works. These studies have demonstrated promising results in treating adult post-operative pain and chemotherapy nausea and in postoperative dental pain. Other conditions, such as addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, osteoarthritis, low back pain and carpal tunnel syndrome may also benefit from acupuncture.

There are two explanations as to how acupuncture works to control pain. First comes from those who practice traditional Chinese medicine. Their theory is that there are patterns or meridians of energy that flow through the body, which are essential for health. Alterations in these energy flows are believed to be responsible for disease. Inserting needles into the appropriate points along energy meridians restores the balance and therefore one's health.

The second explanation is the theory offered by western medicine, which is that pain relief occurs due to the release of chemicals known as endorphins, which are produced naturally in the body; these chemicals mimic morphine (a strong synthetic pain medicine). Endorphins help block pathways that carry the pain message to the brain, thus decreasing the perception of pain along with reducing inflammation.

Acupuncture is available through physiotherapists who have completed their post graduate training in acupuncture and are recognized by the College of Physiotherapists of Manitoba which governs physiotherapy in Manitoba. Physiotherapists will utilize acupuncture as an adjunct to therapy and when combined with a comprehensive treatment program, the results can be impressive. Once the therapist and patient have agreed to a trial of acupuncture, the therapist will carefully insert very fine disposable stainless steel needles that are so fine that three of them will fit into the shaft of a regular hollow injection needle. There are no medications or chemicals injected. Once the needles are inserted they are left for approximately 15 minutes.

During the insertion of the needles there may be a slight discomfort, however, once inserted there should be no significant awareness of the needles; we have had patients fall asleep while the needles are in.

Results can vary in individuals with some experiencing relief immediately while others may experience relief up to four hours post-treatment. Acupuncture has a cumulative

effect; therefore, if only a minimal change was experienced in the initial trial, a subsequent session can add to the previously released endorphins resulting in better pain control. Side effects can be a sense of tiredness and occasionally a slight exacerbation of soreness; otherwise, it's safe and drug-free.