Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine FAQ
WHAT IS TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM)?

Diagnosis and treatment in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is based on thousands of years of studying the purpose, flow, and impact of Qi (energy) in the body. TCM therapies include acupuncture, Chinese herbs, Asian bodywork, moxibustion, cupping and qigong, to name a few. The basic foundation for TCM is that Qi (pronounced “Chee”), or the life energy, flows through the body. This energy flows through the body in channels known as meridians that connect all of our major organs. According to Chinese medical theory, illness arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes unbalanced or is blocked.

WHAT IS ACUPUNCTURE?

The most well-known traditional Chinese medical procedure, acupuncture is the practice of inserting sterilized, stainless-steel needles (that are often as fine as a human hair) into the body at specific points to relieve pain or treat a disease. Acupuncture points are areas of designated electrical sensitivity that have been shown to be effective in the treatment of specific health problems. They have been mapped out by the Chinese over a period of more than 2,000 years.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF ACUPUNCTURE?

The earliest recorded use of acupuncture dates from 200 BCE. Knowledge of acupuncture spread from China along Arab trade routes towards the West. Up until the early 1970s, however, most Americans had never heard of acupuncture.

Acupuncture was formally recognized as part of mainstream medicine’s range of healing options in 1997, when the National Institutes of Health issued a statement documenting its safety and efficacy for a range of health conditions.

The use of acupuncture is on the rise in the United States. Between 1997 and 2007 the number of visits among adults nearly tripled, rising from 27.2 to 79.2 per 1,000 adults. According to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), approximately 3.1 million adults in the United States used acupuncture in 2006, a 47 percent increase from the 2002 estimate.

DOES ACUPUNCTURE WORK?

There is increasing scientific evidence proving the efficacy of acupuncture for the treatment of medical ailments including chemotherapy-induced nausea, autoimmune disorders, chronic back pain, hypertension and allergic rhinitis. The World Health Organization recognizes almost a hundred diseases, symptoms, or conditions for which acupuncture is effective. Much of the research on acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine is being conducted by universities, research institutions, and the National Institutes of Health.
**HOW DOES ACUPUNCTURE WORK?**

The insertion of needles into specific points can alter biochemical and physiological conditions in order to treat a wide variety of illnesses. Research suggests that the needling process, and other modalities used in acupuncture, may produce their complex effects on a wide variety of ways in the brain and the body. For example, it is theorized that stimulated nerve fibers transmit signals to the spinal cord and brain, thus activating parts of the central nervous system. The spinal cord and brain then release certain hormones responsible for making us feel better overall and, more specifically, feel less pain.

Acupuncture may regulate blood circulation and body temperature. It may also affect white blood cell activity (responsible for our immune function), reduce cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and regulate blood sugar levels. In general, acupuncture appears to transmit its effects via electric, neurologic, hormonal, lymphatic, and electromagnetic wave pathways.

**WHAT DOES AN ACUPUNCTURIST DO?**

In addition to asking questions about your health, the acupuncturist may want to take your pulse at several locations along the wrist and look at your tongue to observe its shape, color, and coating. He or she may also observe the color and texture of your skin, your complexion, and other physical characteristics that offer clues to your health. The acupuncturist then asks you to lie down on a padded examining table, and he or she inserts the needles, twirling or gently stimulating each as it goes in. You may not feel the needles at all, or you may feel a quick twinge that subsides as soon as the needle is completely in. Once the needles are all in place, you rest for 15 to 60 minutes. During this time, you’ll probably feel relaxed and sleepy and may even doze off. At the end of the session, the acupuncturist quickly and painlessly removes the needles. The acupuncturist might also discuss diet, exercise, and lifestyle recommendations, as well as herbal supplements.

**HOW MANY TREATMENTS DO I NEED?**

The number of acupuncture treatments you need depends on the complexity of your illness, whether it is a chronic or recent condition, and your general health. For example, you may need only one treatment for a recent wrist sprain, whereas for a long-standing, chronic illness you may need treatments once or twice a week for several months to get desired results.

**WHAT CONDITIONS DOES ACUPUNCTURE TREAT?**

Acupuncture is particularly effective for pain relief and for post-surgery and chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting. In addition, both the World Health Organization and the National Institutes of Health recognize that acupuncture can be a helpful part of a treatment plan for many illnesses. A partial list includes: addiction (such as alcoholism), asthma, bronchitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, constipation, diarrhea, facial tics, fibromyalgia, headaches, irregular periods, low back pain, menopausal symptoms, menstrual cramps, osteoarthritis, sinusitis, spastic colon (often called irritable bowel syndrome), stroke rehabilitation, tendonitis, tennis elbow, and urinary problems such as incontinence. You can safely combine acupuncture with prescription drugs and other conventional treatments, but it is important for your primary care physician to be aware of and to monitor how your acupuncture treatment may be affecting your conventional therapies.

**WHAT KINDS OF PROBLEMS DOES CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE TREAT?**

Chinese herbal medicine treats the full range of human disease, acute illness, like flu and the common cold, to chronic disease, such as allergies, gynecological disorders, autoimmune diseases, chronic viral diseases, and degenerative diseases due to aging. Compared to acupuncture, Chinese herbs treat deeper diseases. Herbs can also help to maintain or create balance and health before disease sets in.

During this time, classical herbal formulas that are effective for many health concerns have been developed. The herbs are available in the form of herbal teas, liquid extracts, tablets, capsules, granules, lotions, creams, salves, or poultices. Many Chinese herbs require a prescription from a licensed herbalist or acupuncturist.
**HOW DO I TAKE THE HERBS?**

Chinese herbs come in various forms: bulk, powder, patent formulas, tablets, capsules, and extracts. Bulk herbs are cooked into a decoction at home and drunk throughout the day. Bulk herbal prescriptions are generally considered to be the most powerful way to take herbs. Powdered herbs are mixed with warm water and ingested two to three times a day. Patents are herbal formulas made into pill form. There are also topical herbs for traumatic injury & skin problems.

**HOW WILL THE HERBS TASTE?**

Chinese herbal teas (bulk herbs and powders) tend to taste very bitter because they are made from mostly roots and barks where the strongest medicinal ingredients are found. Many Chinese herbs have a strong flavor that you may or may not find pleasant. If you find the taste to be a major deterrent to drinking the decoction, taking tablets or capsules may be a better option for you.

**DOES CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE HAVE SIDE EFFECTS?**

Occasionally people do experience side effects with Chinese herbs, such as nausea, irritability, diarrhea, headaches, or abdominal distention. In the rare event that you experience one of these side effects, call your practitioner for instructions. Usually he or she can change your formula to mitigate or eliminate the disagreeable side effects.

**HOW CAN I FIND A QUALIFIED PRACTITIONER?**

Most states require acupuncturists to be licensed and confer a title (LAc in Texas) that these acupuncturists can use to identify themselves. The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine can provide a list of licensed acupuncturists in your area. In Texas you can search the medical board website for licensed practitioners. All of the practitioners at AOMA are licensed in Texas and many hold doctoral degrees in the profession.

**DOES MY MEDICAL INSURANCE COVER CHINESE MEDICAL TREATMENTS?**

Acupuncture is currently covered by many major insurance companies in the United States; however, acupuncture coverage varies greatly depending on the company and individual plan. There are also many components to an acupuncture treatment which an insurance company may only cover partly or not at all. It is important to check with your insurance company to see what coverage your plan offers.

**SOURCES**


AOMA is one of the largest providers of acupuncture and Chinese medicine in central Texas.

The AOMA student clinic offers low-cost acupuncture treatments and herbal medicine consultations from AOMA student interns under the supervision of a licensed acupuncturist.

The AOMA professional clinic accepts the Seton Health Plan, United Health Care & Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Schedule an appointment today: aoma.edu/patients/request-an-appointment/

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AOMA Herbal Medicine has a complete selection of Chinese herbs, books, acupuncture supplies, feng shui and gift items, with hundreds of choices of herbal products from 350 single herbs for raw herb decoctions to powders, patent formulas, tablets & capsules, and extracts. Our manufacturers and distributors are chosen for their high quality, purity and effectiveness.

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