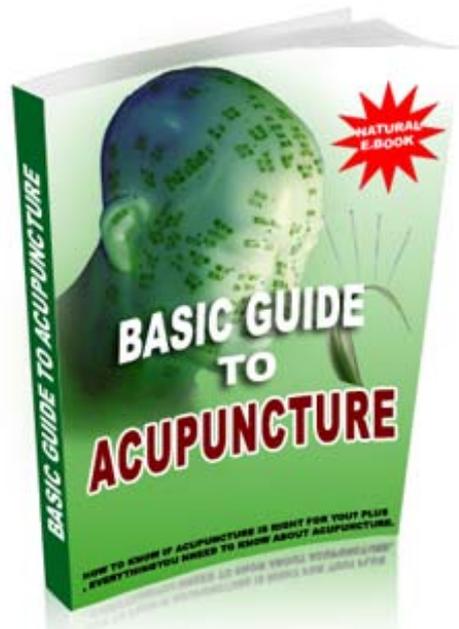


Basic Guide To Acupuncture



By

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Introduction

The origin of acupuncture can be traced back to ancient China. This practice is said to have originated around five thousand years back.

Chinese believe that a living body has two forces which are opposing each other all the time. These are the Yin and Yang. The passive, slow and cold in the body is known as the Yin and the hot, active and excited is known as the Yang.

Energy which gets blocked in the body causing diseases, aches and pains is called the "Chi". This blocked energy is released using acupuncture. According to the Chinese the energy lines pass through the twelve meridians of the body which are invisible.

All organs of the body are governed by one of these meridians. By carrying out the acupuncture procedure on that particular meridian, the disease associated with that point is cured.

History of Acupuncture

The earliest knowledge of the existence of acupuncture is found during the Sui dynasty which existed between AD 561 to 618. During this time, the Imperial Medical College which is one of the earliest medical colleges of China was established.

Evidence shows that acupuncture and moxibustion was the basis of the curriculum. Herbal medicine was also part of the syllabus. The Imperial Medical College which was actually started to conduct researches and train doctors thus records the first mention of the practice of acupuncture.

Acupuncture is also mentioned and discussed in one of the most ancient Chinese Medical Text called the "Huang Di Nei Jing" which was in existence more than two thousand years ago.

With Asia becoming developed and a general improvement in transportation and communication, acupuncture as a part of Chinese Medicine spread in the 6th century to Japan.

With the advent of Buddhism, religious medicine became popular and acupuncture became a popular healing method.

The insertion method which is used by acupuncture practitioners all over the world, especially in Japan was first invented by Waichi Sugiyama in the 17th Century. This insertion tube is small and cylindrical and the needle is inserted through this.

The practice of acupuncture was very predominant in Japan even until the 19th Century. An acupuncturist was equal to the modern doctor and acupuncture was the primary health care procedure followed.

With the introduction of the Dutch and German medicine in the 19th Century, Western methods of treatment started gaining popularity and acupuncture had to take a back seat.

After having decreased in practice for a few decades, acupuncture is again gaining popularity as an effective alternate healing procedure. There are various institutes training efficient acupuncturists in the art of healing through Acupuncture.

Acupuncture today is used alongside modern medicine in a lot of health care systems all over the world. In America, especially North America, acupuncture has gained prominence as an effective pain management therapy in hospitals and health care clinics.

In fact, the acupuncture needles have been declared as safe and effective medical instruments by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the year 1995. Medical schools have started incorporating acupuncture training as a part of their curriculum.

Theories related to Ancient Acupuncture -

Unlike other practices, the practice and method of acupuncture has been mostly retained from what it was in the ancient times even though we have understood the procedure and its implications itself with practice over a period of time.

The principle of Accupuncture revolves around the circulation of vital energy in our body. This energy is called qi. In the acupuncture text Huangdi Neijing (Yellow Emperor's Classic on Internal Medicine), acupuncture is described as a procedure by which the excess qi is released from the body.

This is done by making holes in the energy pathways or meridians also called the Jingluo. This procedure was is so delicate that for some ailments, the qi had to be released carefully without letting out the blood and for some other ailments, the blood had to be let out without disturbing the qi.

This procedure is based on the assumption that diseases enter the living body through the outer skin and penetrates upto the bone marrow through the muscles and the various internal organs. The disease is cured by inserting the needle to the required depth. The depth of insertion is determined based on the degree of the disease penetration.

Before the invention of the microscopes and autopsy procedures which has revealed the working process of the human body, doctors and eminent scholars worked on the basis of the similarities that exist between the human body and the nature outside.

Ancient Chinese Civilization regarded the water courses as a major supporting entity for the human race. The water entity included the rivers, oceans, streams, canals, man made irrigation systems, etc.

Similar to this water system in nature, the human body has a system which consists of moving fluid which is also life giving. This fluid is referred to as the qi and the various paths followed by this fluid are the meridians.

The principle of acupuncture is based on the fact that just as in nature, where the water flow sometimes gets blocked by a fallen tree or a mud slide, the qi in the meridians in the human body too could get blocked due to various factors like disease due to bad weather, intake of improper food, etc.

When this happens, the point upto the blockage has a flow of the qi and beyond the blockage the qi dries up causing aches, pains and diseases.

Just like the water starts flowing immediately after you clear the obstruction, the block in the meridian can also be cleared to enable the fluid to flow freely and restore the natural flow.

When the water system gets blocked you can clear the blockage by making a small opening. The force of the water will push through the opening widening it enough to restore a natural flow.

Similarly, in the meridian blockages, making a small hole with a needle enables the qi to push through the hole and widen it making the flow easier and free. Meridian points in the body has certain points on which using the needle is more effective.

This is the system of approach which is being taught even today to the students opting for traditional acupuncture. All they need to do is to locate the area of disturbance, identify and isolate the points which are blocked and clear the blockage.

Procedures have become more sophisticated with different ways of needling being introduced, based on the depth and direction and even the chemical composition of the needles being used such as gold, silver or steel.

Even the purpose of using the needle differs with different patients. For some, needles are used just to increase the flow of qi in the meridian even if there is no blockage. For some others they may use the needle to decrease the flow of qi depending on what the case may be.

When the qi flow is corrected and balanced, the ailment or disease can be totally eradicated with a controlled diet, exercise and other habits over a period of time.

The Procedure

As we have seen earlier, acupuncture promotes health and relieves pain. Though the method seems quite strange, it is a time tested and validated process practiced for a number of years.

Since the principle of acupuncture involves the balance and imbalance of the energy flow in the meridians or channels, the acupuncturist's perspective of treatment depends on this system.

Based on this principle, the acupuncturist thus stimulates certain areas in the meridians called the "accupoints" with the help of needles which are slender and fine.

Modern acupuncturists also use other things for stimulation of the accupoints like herbs, magnets, lasers and even electricity. The ultimate objective though is to adjust the vital energy in such a way that the body heals itself.

The procedure of acupuncture has been evaluated and adjusted over the centuries according to the various new inventions and discoveries. Modern thinking states that diseases and injuries can be set right by a set of responses which are complex.

According to the modern western perspective, diseases are caused by a problem in these responses which are caused by the signalling systems like the peptides and other bio chemicals travelling from the site they were released at to various other sites in the blood circulation.

Diseases according to modern medical science are caused by the breakdown of the immune system in the human body due to metabolic failures, changes in the DNA structure or micro organisms.

Normally, upto a point the imbalance or disturbance is set right by the cellular functions of the human body which by themselves are designed for healing.

Chronic diseases are caused due to the weakening of the immune system or the self protecting systems which can be due to various reasons like stress, poor nutrition, unhealthy habits, etc.

Modern findings have revealed that acupuncture actually increases the ability of the cells or the mechanisms of the body to heal itself. Acupuncture stimulates the signalling systems which in turn increases the response to healing. Acupuncture thus considerably cures a lot of diseases or in extreme cases helps in alleviating symptoms like reducing the intensity of pain, etc.

The nervous system, as we all know plays the role of signal transmitter. Signals are transmitted by the nerves with the help of peptides. During this process, various biochemicals are emitted which influences the cells of the body.

The hormonal system is connected to the nervous system through the adrenal gland and is thus connected to all cells and systems of the body. A Department of Neurology, Loyola University of Chicago study reports that cranial nerves and spinal nerves were dispersed in and around the area of the accupoints.

Research has further shown that Acupuncture has an effect on endorphins which are one of the neuropeptides. Endorphins are said to alleviate pain. Acupuncture therefore is used predominantly for treating chronic pain and for the treatment of drug addiction especially in the West.

The person who is undergoing the acupuncture treatment has to feel the needling sensation according to eminent traditional Chinese doctors. Sensation caused by the needles varies according to the treatment that is being given.

Acupuncture treatment usually is not supposed to and does not cause pain except in some particular areas. The needling process creates a warm, tingling sensation which sometimes makes you feel numb in that area.

Sometimes, during the needling procedure, the patient feels the pain radiating from the point of needling to another point in the body. Basically while the acupuncturist uses the needle on the patient, what happens is it stimulates certain parts of the nervous system which are responsive.

This in turn sets off a biochemical series speeding up the healing process. Some points in the body called the broad spectrum points, when needled have the capacity to heal more than one disease in the body at a time. Other points are limited in their applications. They affect only one point in the system.

Acupuncturists normally combine both points for an effective healing process. The broad spectrum points are used by almost all acupuncturists to treat a variety of common ailments.

Accupoints which are on the meridian lines do not correspond though to the neural connections very clearly. Modern acupuncturists have identified certain other points based on the similarity to the layout of the human body.

These points include certain points on the outer ear. Acupuncturists have also identified other zones like points on the scalp and hands which corresponds to larger areas of the body. This may be because the spinal cord connects various parts of the body with secondary branches.

Modern concepts and research thus are focussed on finding effective points which will stimulate biochemical responses rather than the traditional qi regulation. Modern methods of acupuncture relies more on electrical stimulation either with or without needling and laser stimulation in contrast to the traditional method of needling and moxibustion which is application of heat.

The process of Acupuncture has thus come a long way since the olden days. Acupuncturists are now using finger pressure which is called acupressure, small balls of metal which is held to the skin with the help of a tape, magnets which are either with small needles or without, piezoelectric stimulus which is an electric discharge of small magnitude and electrical pulsing of low energy.

Acupuncture treatment has to be of the exact duration. If the treatment is of a shorter period than required it may have no effect. Alternately, if the treatment is given more than what is required it may cause the person undergoing the treatment to feel more exhausted and tired. The point is stimulated with a repetitive process of applying pressure or a slight thrust or a swirl.

Extensive research has been done to have a deeper insight into how the process of acupuncture alleviates or reduces pain. The basic thing that happens in the body

when a person goes in for acupuncture procedure is that upon stimulating the acupuncture points, the central nervous system like the brain and the spinal cord are also stimulated.

They then release certain chemicals to the muscles, brain and the spinal cord. These chemicals may then mask the pain or change the pain experience or may even instigate the secretion of certain hormones which influence the body's natural healing and regulating system.

There are three mechanisms by which this is achieved –

1. Conduction of Electromagnetic Signals – According to evidence found by Western Scientists, the acupuncture points actually conduct electromagnetic signals. Upon stimulation, these acupuncture points facilitate in faster or speedier conduction of these signals than under normal circumstances.

The faster conduction of these signals enables the bio chemicals like endorphin to flow freely. Endorphin, being a pain killer along with some other immune system cells starts flowing to the injured or diseased sites in the body to provide the patient some relief from pain.

2. Opioid System Activation – Some other research has proved that acupuncture releases several types of opioids into the central nervous system which reduces the pain of the patient.
3. Changes in Involuntary body functions, Sensation and Brain Chemistry – Studies have shown that acupuncture changes the release of neurohormones and neurotransmitters thereby altering the brain chemistry.

Moreover, acupuncture is also found to affect parts of the central nervous system which are directly related to sensation. These parts are also related to involuntary functions of the body like the immune processes and reactions. These include the patient's blood flow, blood pressure, body temperature, etc.

How exactly does acupuncture work within the framework of the Western medicine is still not very clear. According to the statement issued by The National Institute of Health Consensus acupuncture as a therapy is very predominant in the United States.

Results of the usage of acupuncture on patients undergoing chemotherapy and suffering from nausea and vomiting, in control and reduction of postoperative pain, dental pain, etc have been very positive and encouraging. Acupuncture thus with its pain relieving properties considerably reduces the need for pain killers thereby reducing the side effects for patients.

Side Effects

Acupuncture when performed by an experienced and trained acupuncturist is definitely free from any kind of a side effect. It is a very safe procedure and also very effective.

Acupuncture provides the patient with a much needed sense of relaxation. During and after the procedure, the patient experiences a sense of well being. One more thing in acupuncture is that while you go in for the treatment of one ailment, you find that other ailments in your body simultaneously get treated for. This is because of the balance of the vital energy in the body.

Limits

There are limits to the procedure though. You cannot rely on acupuncture for treating all the ailments eliminating the western medicine altogether. Life threatening diseases are best handled by Western Medicine where acupuncture could be used in conjunction for providing pain relief to the patients.

Common, routine and chronic health problems can be effectively handled by acupuncture. Acupuncture mainly provides the patient with relaxation and a sense of well being by providing relief from pain. One must remember though to go to a trained and licensed acupuncturist for best results.

Is Acupuncture Painful?

Absolutely not....it is absolutely painless in fact less painful than plucking out a hair. During the procedure the patient experiences a mild tingling sensation to a feeling of numbness. Some may also feel electrical pulsations in other areas and parts of the body.

Sensations last only till the needles are inserted. Once the needles are removed, the sensation disappears. Needles are solid, not hollow, smaller than the hypodermic needles and do not draw blood.

Effects of the treatment are usually manifested after about five to ten sittings. Initially the effect is too subtle to be perceived.

Safety

To be absolutely safe, as mentioned earlier, it is best to approach a licensed acupuncturist who will use sterilized or disposable needles for treatment to avoid any kind of the spread of infectious diseases. Bleeding almost never occurs unless intentionally.

Acupuncture Points

Traditionally the acupuncture points were 365 in number pertaining to the number of days in a year. These points were on fourteen meridian lines, one meridian for each of the twelve organs of the body. One meridian was along the spinal cord which was the governing meridian and one more on the midline of the abdomen called the conception vessel.

Of late, the number of points identified and used have increased manifold. There are innumerable meridians with accupoints apart from the traditional points. There are even some special points which are not on any of the meridians.

Other newly identified points include the ones along the outer ears, points on the scalp, on the feet, wrists, ankles, hands and the nose. In spite of these innumerable points being identified, acupuncturists still prefer to use the traditional accupoints situated on the fourteen main meridians.

There are certain points on each meridian which are used more by acupuncturists as these points are more versatile and can be used for treating a variety of patients and diseases.

Given below is a list of the names of some of the meridians, the points which are standard on that meridian, classification by numbers and the Chinese name of the point.

Large Intestine Meridian, Point NO.4 of 20, LI4, HEGU –

Location of this point is at the back of the hand. It is situated in between the first finger and the thumb. This point is mainly used for pain relief and treatment of constipation and bowel disorders. Other conditions which are treated with the use of this point are inflammatory and feverish diseases which have affected the throat and head.

LI 11 is a key point which is also located on this meridian. This meridian is also known as Quchi. This is located at the elbow and is used for treating various disorders in the upper body like lymphatic swellings, difficulty in moving the arms, intestinal disorders like intestinal cramps and diarrhoea, eye pain, sore throat, etc.

Lung Meridian, Point No.7 of 11, LU7, Lieque -

The lung meridian point is situated on the inside of the arm above the wrist. This point is commonly used to treat disorders of the upper body like neck stiffness, asthma, cough, sore throat, paralysis of the face, problems of the wrist, headache, etc.

Stomach Meridian, Point No.36 of 45, ST36, Zusanli -

The front side of the leg below the knee is where this point is located. This point is increasingly being used to treat digestive problems like nausea, vomiting, abdominal distension, gastric problems and for general weakness.

Recent studies have also shown that this point is effective in treatment of anaemia, fatigue, immune deficiency, etc.

Spleen Meridian, Point No.6 of 21, SP6, Sanyinjiao –

The location of this point is just above the ankle on the inner side. Being located in the spleen meridian this point understandably treats digestive disorders. Apart from this it is also used for effectively treating hormonal disorders like impotence, menstruation problems and also immunity disorders.

This meridian has another important point on it which is the SP 9 which is also known as the Yinglingquan. This point is located just below the knee and is used for treating diseases related to the urinary function of the body. Urinary diseases related to retention of fluid, abdominal pain and back pain, reproductive system disorders in women, etc are some of the problems which are being treated with the help of this point.

Gallbladder Meridian, Point No.20 of 44, GB 20, Fengchi –

The base of the skull where the neck joins the skull is where this point is located. This point is related to the treatment of acute disorders like neck pain, fever, influenza, headache, common cold, etc.

Treating this point also significantly lowers the blood pressure and helps in relaxing tension especially in the areas around the eyes. This meridian has another point which is the GB34 also known as the Yanglingquan. This point is on the outer side of

the knee. Acupuncturists use this point to treat injuries and muscle and tendon disorders.

Liver Meridian, Point No.3 of 14, LV3, Taichong –

This point is present between the first and the second toes at the foot top. Menstruation regulation, reducing uneasiness, pain and tension in the chest area, eye disorders treatment, headaches, high blood pressure and balancing emotional energy are the various things which are treated with this point.

Another point close to this point is the LV2 or the Xingjian. This point is present at the webbing between the toes. This point is also very important and is generally used along with LV3. Along with treatment of all the above mentioned symptoms, this point also treats disorders of the abdomen like urinary infections, etc.

Pericardium Meridian, Point No.6 of 9, PC6, Neiguan–

Situated just above the wrist on the inner arm, this point like other points on this meridian is used to treat cardiac disorders. These include angina pectoris, palpitations, etc. This point is also used to treat spasms, convulsions, nausea and vomiting.

Heart Meridian, Point 7 of 9, HT7, Shenmen-

This point which is situated on the outer side of the wrist is used to treat various disorders of the mind like hysteria, depression, mental illness, feeling of agitation, disturbing dreams, insomnia and absent mindedness.

This point sometimes is also used to treat heart diseases and related fatigue.

Urinary Bladder Meridian, Point No.40 of 67, BL40, Weizhong –

You will find this point behind the knee and is used for the treatment of conditions related to urinary tract. Diseases which are treated using this point include vomiting, diarrhoea, pain in the abdomen, pain in the leg and immobility, muscular atrophy, hip problem, pain in the back, etc.

There is another point on the bl23 meridian which is very important. This point is in the lumbar area near the spine. It is used to treat various disorders like urinary infections, lower back pain, dizziness, weakness in the knee, asthma, diarrhoea, blurring of the vision, edema, menstrual disorders, etc.

The bladder meridian is actually quite important because it passes on either side of the spine and is associated with all the organs around it.

Kidney Meridian, Point No.3 of 27, KI3, Taixi –

This point is at the back of the inner ankle. Conditions for which this point is treated include toothache, deafness, tinnitus, thirst, impotence, lower back pain, irregular menstrual cycle, frequent urination, insomnia, asthma and dizziness.

Triple Burner Meridian, Point No.5 of 23, TB5, Waiguan –

The type of organ system which spans the whole of the torso is the triple burner. The point is located on the outer side of the arm just above the wrist. Treating this point cures the patient of disorders of organs situated along this meridian like the neck, cheek, top of the head, ears, arms, fingers and hands.

Small Intestine Meridian, Point No.3 of 19, SI3, Houxi –

The region of your hand just below the small finger is where this point is situated. This point is used for the treatment of disorders related to the mind, neck problems like stiffness and pain, chest, seizures, lumbar region, fevers and night sweats.

Governing Vessel, Point No.20 of 28, GV20, Baihui –

This is a point which is located on the head. This point is usually treated for disorders of the mind and other problems occurring in the head like vertigo, nasal obstruction, ringing in the ears, headache, speech difficulty, etc.

Prolapse of uterus and rectum is also treated with this point. GV14 is an important point in this meridian. This point is also known as the Dazhui. This is just below the seventh cervical vertebrae. Conditions which are treated with this point include upper back problem, neck pain, convulsions, asthma, common cold, cough, fevers, etc.

Conception Vessel, Point No.4 of 24, CV4, Guanyuan–

Situated just below the navel, this point is treated for lower abdominal problems which include the urinary disorders, menstrual problems, gynaecological infection, hernia, diarrhoea, prolapse of the rectum, etc.

There is another point which is very important on this meridian. This is the CV6 or the Qihai. This point is located midway between CV4 and the navel. This point treats all the above mentioned symptoms when accompanied by fatigue.

Combining Points -

Following are the points that are recommended to be used in combinations for certain conditions according to the book called Modern Clinic Necessities for Acupuncture and Moxibustion by Zhang Ren and Dong Zhi Lin.

Menopausal Symptoms –

Main points are GV14 and GV20, CV4, BL 23, SP6, ST36 and HT7.

Secondary points are PC6, LV3 and K13.

Bed Wetting for small children–

Main points are BL23, CV4, and SP6.

Secondary points are LU7, KI3, CV6 and ST36.

Hay Fever –

Main points are GB20, LI4 and ST36.

Secondary points are GV14, LU7, LI11 and SP6.

According to Miriam Lee, a senior acupuncturist, a combination of points which are widely used for effective applications are ST36, LI4, SP6, LI11 and LU7.

These set of points when skilfully manipulated like leaving out or including one or two of them are found to be effective in treating a lot of common ailments and diseases.

About The Meridians –

As we have seen earlier, Chinese medicine explains acupuncture as a procedure which treats the human body involving various systems of functions associated with the physical organs.

According to them disease is the imbalance between the yin and yang energies. Diseases are treated by using the acupuncture needles on certain points on the body called the acupuncture points also known as “Xue” in Chinese.

Normally, acupuncture treatment involves using the needles along twelve major pathways in the body called the meridians. Apart from these there are other pathways which are know as the 8 extraordinary pathways. These are the Qi Jing Ba Mai, the Sinew Channels, the Divergents and the Luo vessels.

There are also the tender points which are unaffiliated. These are called the “ah shi” points and are used for treating local pains.

Only two of the extraordinary pathways have acupuncture points on them. Master and couple point techniques are used to activate the other six meridians. This is done by needling one or more of the acupuncture points located on the twelve major meridians in the body which corresponds to the extraordinary pathway in question.

About ten of the primary meridians are named after the different organs of the body they are associated with like the Heart, liver, etc. One meridian is named after the membrane wrapping the heart called the Serous Membrane.

The last meridian is the “three spaces” or the San Jiao. These two independent extraordinary pathways are located in the middle of the trunk and head in between the anterior and posterior parts.

All the primary pathways run symmetrically, bilaterally and vertically. Channels connect internally with any one of the twelve Zang Fu or organs.

There are six “Yin”, six “Yang” channels in our body, out of which three “Yin” and three “Yang” channels are on each arm, and three are on each leg. The “Yin” hand-channels correspond to the Lung, Pericardium and Heart and starts on the chest travelling to the hand through the inner surface of the arm.

The three “Yang” channels like the Large intestine, San Jiao and the Small intestine start on the hand and travels on the outer surface of the arm towards the head.

The “Yin” channels on the foot corresponding to the Spleen, Liver and Kidney start on the foot and travels along the inner surface of the leg towards the chest.

The “Yang” channels of the foot which are three in number corresponding to the Stomach, Gall bladder and Bladder start on the face around the eye region. It travels down along the outer surface of the leg to the foot.

The “qi” movement through the primary channels which are twelve in number is through two sets of pathways – the external pathway and the internal pathway. The external pathway which is superficial is what is normally shown on acupuncture charts.

Accupoints lie on the channels on the external pathways. The deep channels which enter the various organs or Zang fu in the body are the internal pathways. The external or the superficial pathways of the twelve channels are comprised of three circuits like the Chest to hands, feet to chest, head to feet, hands to head, etc.

“qi” distribution through the pathways is like this – Lung channel that is in the hand or “Taiyin” to the channel of large-Intestine of the hand or the “Yangming” to channel of stomach in the foot “Yangming”. From here it goes to the Spleen-channel of the foot “Taiyin” into the channel of heart located in your hand hand “Shaoyin”, then to the channel of the small-intestine of the hand “Taiyang” to the channel of bladder of the foot “Taiyang” to the kidney channel of the foot “Shaoyin”. The qi then travels to the channel of pericardium in the hand “Jueyin” to “San Jiao” channel of the hand “Shaoyang”, then to Gallbladder channel of the foot “Shaoyang” into the Liver channel of the foot “Jueyin” and then back to the channel of lungs that lies in the hand “Taiyin”.

Time occupied by each channel is two hours and it begins with the Lung channel 3 AM to 5 AM and comes full circle with the Liver at 1 AM to 3 AM.

The Acupuncture Needle –

Nowadays, the acupuncturists use disposable needles made of stainless steel. These needles are very fine. The diameter is about 0.0007” to 0.020” or 0.18 mm to 0.51 mm. These needles are sterilized using ethylene oxide or by autoclave.

Being much smaller than the needles used for giving injections, these needles are much less painful. They are also not hollow like the needles used for giving injections.

The top of the needle is wound with a thick wire like bronze or is covered with plastic. This is done to make the needle stiff and also to provide a grip or a handle for the acupuncturist while he is performing the process.

Needles are of various sizes and types. Depending on what purpose it is required for determines the size, type and the depth of insertion of the needle.

A type of acupuncture treatment requires the needle end to be warmed up using herbs. This process is called moxibustion. This is sometimes used as a supplement treatment.

One well known technique used is by using dried moxa. The acupuncturist inserts the needle at the desired point, attaches dried moxa to the external end of the needle and ignites it.

The moxa smoulders for some time conducting the heat through the needle to the area surrounding the needle in the patient's body.

Another technique involves holding a glowing stick of moxa over the needle. Sometimes moxa is even burnt near the surface of the skin. An ointment is applied on the skin to protect it from burns.

Vascular headache is also effectively treated by acupuncture. This is done by stimulating sensitive points which are present in the center of the webs between the palms and the thumb of the patient. These are called the "he gu" points.

Stimulating these points targets the face and the head of the patient. This is effectively used to treat various disorders affecting the head and face. The procedure starts with making the patient lie down flat and sterilizing the points on both the hands with alcohol.

Disposable needles are then inserted to a depth of around 3 to 5 mm until a "twinge" is felt by the patient. This "twinge" is accompanied by a slight twitching in the point of insertion of the needle.

Needles are left for about fifteen to twenty minutes during which time the patient relaxes and rests and then they are removed.

Patients suffering from acute Vascular headaches may experience sensitivity to pain at the point of insertion of needle, feeling of nausea throughout the procedure and simultaneous relief from headache.

Medical Acupuncture –

Medical acupuncture was basically created for practitioners like doctors, physiotherapists, chiropractors, osteopaths, etc. Acupuncture in the West has been incorporated and modified to create a version of its own which is though not as popular as the traditional Chinese acupuncture.

With the alternate medicines gaining popularity, medical practitioners in the West are becoming more aware of the advantages and effectiveness of acupuncture.

The evolution of Medical acupuncture can be seen as an attempt by the Western medicine to look at the practice of acupuncture from a scientific point of view rather than the traditional Chinese perspective.

Patients who have to undergo Medical Acupuncture treatment are determined with the help of various symptoms. For example, people suffering from muscular and skeletal pain respond well to acupuncture.

It is also easy to quantify and measuring the progress of the treatment is relatively simple. For these reasons, physicians normally treat the patient with acupuncture for muscular and skeletal pains before proceeding to give medications.

A physician trained in Chinese medicine usually treats a lot of other ailments effortlessly with acupuncture. For example, acupuncture may be the best treatment option for a patient suffering from constant allergic sinusitis or even asthma. If the condition persists in spite of analgesics and decongestants or even steroids and antibiotics, acupuncture is the best treatment method that can be effective.

Another condition which can be effectively treated with acupuncture for post operative pain is paralytic ileus. Acupuncture can also be used for treating reduced post operative bowel motility to enable the patient to recover faster.

Patients suffering from conditions like Asthma and chronic bronchospasm can also be treated with acupuncture. Doing this reduces the need to take more bronchodilators that has unpleasant side effects. This also reduces the patient's dependency on steroids.

Medical acupuncture is thus very effective as a complementary treatment along with allopathy in a lot of conditions. Patients suffering from long standing complex conditions and who are on antidepressants, steroids, tranquilizers, etc for a long period of time may have to go in for more sessions of acupuncture for effective cure.

Some of the conditions which respond well to acupuncture include posttraumatic and post operative ileus, acute and chronic pain control, muscle spasms, anxiety, paresthesiae, neuralgias, drug detoxification, seventh nerve palsy, gastro intestinal disorders like nausea, vomiting, etc, vertigo, chronic headache, frozen shoulder, phantom pain, arthritis, cervical and lumbar spine syndromes, sprains and contusions, pain control for fractures, edema, insomnia, anorexia, atypical chest pain, allergic sinusitis, hiccups, constipation, diarrhoea, severe hyperthermia, cough, acupuncture anaesthesia for high risk patients like those who previously have had adverse reactions to anaesthetics, among many others.

As we can thus see, medical acupuncture is a practice which has been successfully integrated with the medical and allied health practices in the West. Source of acupuncture as we have seen is Asian and European. This is also practiced in pure and hybrid forms.

Needles with therapeutic properties are inserted in a variety of combinations and patterns which forms the foundation of medical acupuncture. Choice of needle patterns is a balance between traditional principles of encouraging qi flow through the meridians or channels and the modern concepts of recruiting neuroanatomical activities in segmental distributions.

Physicians choose either of the two methods or work in combination. This easily adaptable balance between classical principles and modern western medical approach is the key to the success of the popularity of medical acupuncture.

Medical Acupuncture – History

Medical acupuncture gained popularity among the Westerners in the year 1971. Before this, acupuncture was predominantly practiced in the West only in the Asian communities among the Asians discreetly.

The key factor which triggered an interest in this field was an article published by James Reston in the New York Times. This landmark article described his successful post appendectomy pain management with the help of acupuncture needles.

Another factor which evinced a lot of interest in acupuncture in the West in the early 1970s was the visit of the Western physicians to China. These visitors reported having witnessed surgical analgesia using only acupuncture needles.

Late 1970s saw respect for the technique of acupuncture growing manifold when acupuncture analgesia was directly linked to the central nervous system. Acupuncture was found to influence the endogenous opioid peptides and biogenic amines in the central nervous system.

Since 1970s the practice of acupuncture has slowly and steadily gained popularity with the setting up of guidelines for the education, regulation and practice of this procedure.

Various state, regional, national and international societies have sprung up representing the interests of acupuncturists and affinity group practitioners from all over the world.

The oldest mention of acupuncture in China is in the Huang Di Nei Jing or the Yellow Emperor's Classic. The oldest portions of this date back to the 2nd Century BC. The authors of this book worked on the assumption that the human body resembles the structure and composition of the universe.

According to them, the role of the physician was to maintain the human body's harmonious balance both within itself and with the external environment.

In 282 AD a comprehensive manual based on procedures and principles of acupuncture as well as the Moxibustion was compiled by Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing. This is based on the previous text and was written by Huang-Fu Mi. This is the oldest text written entirely about acupuncture and moxibustion which deals with the ancient technique of used preheated acupuncture needles that are tipped with a blazing dry herb called mugwort.

A synthesis of all the classical texts was published in the year 1601. This was the Zhen Jiu Da Cheng or the Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion written and compiled by Yag Ji Zhou. This was one of the most influential and popular medical text for generations to come in Asia and Europe.

The first three decades of the nineteenth century saw a flurry of experimentations of primitive acupuncture methods in Germany, England, France, Italy, Sweden and the United States. This interest was only renewed a century later in Europe and only in the 1970s in the United States.

One of the key persons who helped revive the practice of acupuncture in the twentieth century in Europe was George Soulie de Morant. He was a scholar and a diplomat from France based in China from 1901 to 1917.

He did this by publishing lot of articles on this subject. He also translated a lot of Chinese and Japanese medical texts after he returned to France. He also taught the French physicians clinical applications of acupuncture.

He was the one who introduced the theory of acupuncture from the texts that are classical to the medical communities in Europe and France. He popularised the terms “meridian” and “energy” in his books as translations for the fundamental principles of acupuncture – physiology and anatomy.

Clinical acupuncture after this just co developed with biomedical science in the twentieth century France and in Europe after the 1950s.

The term acupuncture itself is a western name which means “puncturing with needles”. Though the procedure of acupuncture has evinced interest among the Western physicians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, it gained more popularity after President Nixon’s visit to China in the year 1972.

Surgeons witnessed a surgery being performed with the aid of analgesia through acupuncture in place of using conventional anaesthetics. This catapulted acupuncture to the global stage and acupuncture became a global phenomenon.

Most of the acupuncturists in the United Kingdom are either medical doctors or allied health professionals. There is a society called the British Medical Acupuncture Society which trains these doctors and professionals.

This kind of organizations is present in a lot of countries. In fact, the International Council of Medical Acupuncturists or the ICMART is an organization which represents acupuncturists from over eighty countries.

How Different is the Western Medical Acupuncture?

There are quite a few differences between the Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Medical Acupuncture.

According to history, the Classical Chinese Acupuncture is based on Taoist thought and naturalism. This is being practiced in China for over thousand years.

Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM is a later version of herbal and acupuncture medicine. The Cultural Revolution period saw the revival of herbal medicine and acupuncture. These were then re-established by Mao Zedong and are actually the present form which is integrated with the Western concepts of medicine.

The modern form of this ancient practice of acupuncture is used in a lot of hospitals especially in Korea, Japan and some parts of Europe.

Medical acupuncture on the other hand is the contemporary form of this procedure which was developed by doctors in the United States and Great Britain.

Though the basic concept is from the traditional acupuncture, the modern medical acupuncture is quite different in various ways. While Classical acupuncture is based on procedures which are in use for over thousands of years, the Western medical acupuncture does not heed the traditional theories and concepts.

Classical acupuncture purely goes by observations and techniques which are traditional whereas the Western medical acupuncture derives its concepts from anatomy and physiology.

The terms used for describing classical acupuncture is the 'Taoist Metaphor' and languages used on a daily basis whereas the Western medical acupuncture uses terms based on biomedicine.

Apart from these theoretical differences, there are certain practical differences too. Traditional acupuncturists treat for symptoms as a whole and work on the overall energy imbalance in the body. They thus insert several needles in the patients and leave them inserted for at least twenty minutes or even longer.

Western medical acupuncturists on the other hand use far lesser needles and go in for very brief insertions for maybe two to three minutes.

This may be due to the fact that Medical acupuncture is carried out amidst a busy and bustling practice and the practitioner finds little or no time to spend on elaborate insertions with a lot of needles. So the procedure is reduced to a single needle therapy fine tuned to maximum efficiency.

One advantage of this situation is that this makes Medical acupuncture easy to learn than the traditional acupuncture and is more easily practiced by doctors, osteopaths, chiropractors, podiatrists, and other health practitioners. These people also do not see this procedure as something different. Rather they view this as an extension of what they are already doing.

Right Place to Needle –

The right place to needle depends on the trigger point concept. This concept is generally used to determine the needle insertion points.

These points are usually situated in the muscles and are areas which are very tender. Pain radiates from these points to distant areas in the body. TCM refers to these points as the "Ah Shi" points.

Another concept is to decide on the needling point and procedure based on the body segments. Spinal cord has a lot of segments with pairs of nerve roots extending from it along the length.

Based on which nerve roots supplies to which part of the skin it is possible to find out which are the segments supplying sensation to which part of the body.

At deeper levels, there are the myotomes which are related to muscles and sclerotomes which are related to the bones and joints. Medical acupuncture sometimes involves inserting the needles into the segments which correspond to the affected or diseased internal organs.

Electro acupuncture is one technique used by the Medical acupuncturists. This technique has been developed by acupuncturists from Europe and Japan.

The highlight of this technique is that it uses only 24 points. According to this method, each meridian has a test point, a tonification point and a sedation point.

The procedure involves the recording of the electrodermal current at the point to be tested which has been identified on the meridian. The recorded values are then placed on a chart.

These values are then analyzed to determine which of these meridians is hyper functioning and which ones are hypofunctioning. For hypofunctioning meridians, the needle is inserted in the tonification point. This increases the electronic impulse which is flowing through the meridian.

To set right the hyperfunctioning meridian, the sedation point is needed in order to decrease the electronic activity in the meridian. Thus the meridians are balanced and there are only 24 points that one has to remember on these meridians.

Western Acupuncture Mechanism –

Western medicine has explained the pain control action and analgesic in two different ways.

The gate theory of pain was put forth by Patrick Wall and Robert Melzack about thirty years ago. This states that there are gates or filters in the spinal cord which can increase or decrease the transmission of the pain information to the nervous system.

The second theory states that there are the pain relieving substances called the opiates which are present in the central nervous system. These substances include the endorphins and enkephalins.

Understanding the Pressure Points –

Pressure points are of different types. When applied differently each of these create effects which are different. These are effectively used in various martial arts.

Following are some of the principles related to pressure points –

Pain – If there are more nerves prevalent in a certain area then these points are more painful. The human body has a natural tendency to move away from pain. This is called the pain withdrawal reflex. These are used effectively in martial arts.

For instance, if you apply pressure near the collar bone from above, the person will move downwards which is away from the pain. If you poke them between the jaw and the neck just below the ear, they will move upwards.

If you apply pressure to the shoulder, the side of the body where the pressure is applied will move backwards. If you jab the abdomen people will twist violently away from pain.

If the back is rubbed down, the body will move forwards. This is because some points react violently to change in pressure rather than applying constant pressure.

The carotid artery has a baroreceptor which is sensitive to pressure. This allows the body to control the flow of blood to the brain. If pressure is applied to this region, the body will automatically lower the blood pressure as the signals will indicate a rise in blood pressure. This may eventually cause a black out.

If veins and arteries are struck, it will cause them to shut or tear thereby leading to a blackout and sometimes even death if not attended to on time.

The loose rib and the philtrum are areas on top of the skull which even breaks if stuck at the right point.

Certain joints get hyper extended or even torn apart when stuck. This technique can even cause permanent damage or disfiguration of the opponent.

Striking is of two types – using brute force and Golgi organs. Brutal force takes advantage of the striking point being vulnerable and causes extensive damage.

Golgi organs are a relatively gentle strike on the Golgi tendon which is at the back of the elbow. Striking this triggers a reflex which in turn relaxes the tendon immediately.

When this happens the elbow bends effortlessly in the wrong direction. When the elbow is stuck immediately with force, it can even break. This is much easier than applying brute force.

The brain is enclosed in the skull because it is very vulnerable. The brain is balanced on the spine which is flexible and it floats in the cerebral spinal fluid. Martial arts also teach techniques which can shake the brain to the extent that it causes blackout.

What is commonly taught in the martial arts is to strike below the occipital ridge at the right angle and in the right direction. The temples and the top of the skull are also vulnerable to these techniques. The same principles apply to the techniques of acupuncture.

Some people also believe that the acupuncture meridians have the energy channels flowing through them around the body. This energy is referred to as the “qi” in Asia. TCM states that there are various pathways called meridians in the human body on which there are a lot of acupressure points.

When these points are pressed or seized or struck with a specific intent at a predetermined angle it alters the qi circulation. Doing this either heightens or diminishes the circulation of energy in the body. All this can be achieved through the procedure of acupuncture.

There is one thing to be understood here. Pressure points used in martial arts is not the acupuncture points used for treatment of disorders. Acupuncture points are those which are very effective in treatment without causing a lot of pain.

Secondly, though acupuncture is very effective medically, it is not as effective as to stop a person who is attacking you. Acupuncturists actually combine points to produce a healing effect as we have seen earlier.

Diagnostic Methods in Traditional Chinese Medicine –

As seen earlier, the basis of Chinese philosophy of treatment is that everything depends on normalizing the flow of qi or “vital energy”, blood and the fluids in the body.

Pain and diseases are treated by correcting locally the accumulated deficiencies. Chinese traditional medicinal theory strongly believes that any kind of a pain indicates either a blockage of the qi flow, blood or the fluids in the body. According to them the axiom goes thus - “no pain, no blockage” or “no blockage, no pain”.

Another axiom which depicts the delicate balance between the blood and the qi goes thus – “blood is the mother of qi, and qi is the commander of blood”. Both qi and blood work together in order to move the qi and to nourish the blood and the body fluids.

Patients experience some sensations termed by the Chinese as “deqi” which means receiving the qi or the arrival of the qi. Traditionally, when the patient experiences this sensation, it was sufficient evidence that the right acupuncture point for treatment has been located or identified.

Modern medical acupuncture uses certain electronic devices which are programmed to make a noise when what they press the exact acupuncture point.

In Traditional-Chinese-Medicine or TCM, there are four methods of diagnosis- Inspection, Auscultation and Olfaction, Inquiring and Palpation.

Inspection – Inspection involves carefully studying the face, especially the tongue. This includes the analysis of the size, shape, tension, color and coating of the

tongue. This method also studies the presence or absence of teeth marks around the edge.

Olfaction and Auscultation – this method involves listening for certain sounds like wheezing and also looking into the body's distinct odor.

Seven Inquiries – this method involves the “seven inquiries”. These are –

- Perspiration
- Chills and fever
- Thirst and taste
- Appetite
- Defecation and urination
- Menses and leucorrhoea
- Pain and sleep

Palpitation – this method involves physically feeling the body for what is called the tender “ashi” points. This also involves the palpation of both the right and the left radial pulses at both the superficial and the deeper levels.

The three positions, namely the Cun, Guan and Chi which are in immediate proximity to the crease of the wrist and at a proximity of one or two fingers breadth is also palpated with the index, middle and the ring fingers.

There are many other forms of diagnostic methods depending on the form or type of acupuncture to be employed.

Perspective of TCM on Treatment of Diseases –

TCM is traditionally based on treating the disharmony patterns rather than the biomedical diagnosis as we have seen earlier. People who are practicing both the modern medicine and traditional acupuncture though have noted and commented on the relationship between the two.

A pattern of TCM disharmony may be described in a certain range in biomedical diagnosis. For example the TCM deficiency called the Spleen Qi deficiency can be referred to in the biomedical diagnosis as persistent fatigue, diarrhoea or uterine prolapse.

Similarly, a group of patients with a similar biomedical diagnosis may have varying patterns in TCM. The TCM aphorism states – “One disease, many patterns; one pattern, many diseases”.

This clearly shows that treatment of acupuncture is individualized. It is based more on intuitive impressions and definitely not on a set pattern or controlled scientific research.

What Critics Say.....

As with every other field, TCM and the practice of acupuncture has faced criticism through the ages.

According to critics the TCM theories are not based on scientific methods and solid proofs as there is no actual physical histological as well as anatomical basis for the presence or existence of meridians or accupoints in the body.

One vociferous critic of the traditional acupuncture was the former president as well as the founder of the prestigious Medical Acupuncture Society (1959-1980) was Felix Mann. He was also the president of the British Medical Acupuncture Society in the year 1980. He wrote the first comprehensive book on acupuncture in English language called “Acupuncture: The Ancient Chinese Art of Healing”.

This book was published in the year 1962 in which he talks about Reinventing Acupuncture: A New Concept of Ancient Medicine.

According to him, “the ‘traditional’ acupuncture points are as real as the colored spots a drunken man sees with his eyes”. He also says “the acupuncture meridians are no more real than the meridians of geography. If someone used a spade to dig ‘Greenwich-meridian’, he will eventually go to a mental asylum. Moreover, it’s possible that doctors who believe in ‘acupuncture-meridians will suffer the same fate”.

Robert Todd Carroll, a philosopher calls acupuncture a “pseudoscience” as it confuses the Metaphysical claims with the Empirical claims. He states that:

“It does not matter how it’s done, still scientific approaches are falling short of active theories to demonstrate that by unblocking Chi through acupuncture or by a different method is effectual in order to treat any disease. Empirical science is yet to detect Chi.”

According to George A.Ulett, MD, PhD who works at the eminent University of Missouri School of Medicine as the Clinical Professor of Psychiatry; “if you do not use ‘metaphysical-thinking’, you will find that acupuncture is just a simple method that can be useful as a non-conventional pain reliever.”

Though he believes that the traditional Chinese methods basically involve a type of placebo-treatment, he also accepts that more than eighty acupuncture points have been proven useful for effective pain control.

According to Ted J. Kaptchuk, the author of “The Web That Has No Weaver”, acupuncture is something “prescientific”. Regarding the theory of TCM; Kaptchuk says “these ideas are speculative and cultural ideas that provide direction and orientation for the practical patient situation.

You will find a few secrets buried here that have been derived from ancient Oriental wisdom. You will find that when these ideas are presented beyond the circumstances that involve Traditional Chinese Medicine and on the basis of conventional therapies and diagnostic methods, they seem to be fragmented and devoid of scope. These treatments will only be able to prove their effectiveness only when they are used to treat patients who suffer from chronic health problems.

The NIH consensus statement states that "despite considerable efforts to understand the physiology and anatomy of the "Acupuncture Points" as well as their characterization and definition still remain controversial.

Even more intangible, is the basis a few important, yet, traditional Eastern-medical perspectives that believe in the meridian system as well as the circulation of qi. It also includes the five phases theory that are difficult to merge with the current biomedical information but still continue to play an important part in the assessment of patients and the formulation of treatment in acupuncture.

There are critics who criticize the method in which the studies are conducted to prove that acupuncture is nothing more than a placebo. According to them most of these studies are not conducted in a proper manner as many are not double blinded or randomised.

Double blinding in fact is next to impossible in acupuncture as this is not some medicine or a pill to be administered. This is a procedure which has to be conducted properly. Neither the patient nor the acupuncturist can be blind folded at any stage of the treatment.

This is also a problem faced in biomedicine studies which requires double blinding. Virtually all the surgical procedures like physical therapy, dentistry, etc cannot be studied by this method.

Tonelli, who is one of the notable critics of Evidence Based Medicine or EBM, says that Complementary and Alternative Medicine or CAM cannot be considered as EBM unless one would alter or change the definition of evidence.

According to Tonelli "the methods of developing knowledge within CAM currently have boundaries and are subject to varied and biased interpretation. CAM must defend and develop a coherent and rational method for assessing efficacy and casualty , although it is not necessarily based on the results of guarded clinical trials".

There are researchers who say that no evidence exists which shows that acupuncture has any kind of an effect on the pathogenesis of viruses and micro organisms or on the human physiology.

The only effect of this procedure is on the neurological pathways which are associated with the cells of the nerves stimulated by them. They accept though that acupuncture has an important role to play in the area of pain control and nothing beyond that.

Some others argue that there is no evidence or proof to indicate that acupuncture is nothing more than a placebo. These researchers also argue that based on experiments conducted which meet with scientific standards it has been effectively proved that acupuncture is certainly more effective than no treatment at all or a placebo in a pill form.

The general conclusion arrived at by the researchers is that the invasive and extended procedures of acupuncture generate placebo effects which are more powerful than the pills.

They also conclude that acupuncture stimulates the afferent nerve endings on the skin surface which in turn releases biochemical compounds such as endorphins which in turn relieves the pain.

We can thus conclude that it is only due to difficulties in experimentation procedures which prevent deeper understanding of the relationship between acupuncture and pain relief.

Physiological Mechanisms of Acupuncture—

Neurohormonal Theory – Transmission of pain can be adjusted or modulated along various pain pathways at many levels in the brain. These pathways include the Periaqueductal Gray, Thalamus and the feedback pathways from the Cerebral cortex to the thalamus.

Each one of these structures of the brain are responsible for processing different aspects of the pain like emotional pain, perception of the pain, recognition of the harm caused by the pain, localizing the origin of the pain, etc.

Blockage of the pain at these locations of the brain is mediated by the neurohormones especially the ones which bind to the opioid receptors which are the pain blockade sites.

Relief of pain by administering morphine drug or the exogenous opioid acts on the same opioid receptor as do the endorphins and the endogenous opioids. These are produced and released by the brain.

Some other studies stipulate that the acupuncture procedure stimulates the discharge of 'natural-endorphins' in our brain. This fact can be proved conclusively by blocking the action of endorphins or morphine. This is done by using a drug called naloxone.

By administering naloxone, the patient begins to feel the pain again. This is because naloxone reverses the analgesic effects of morphine. Similarly, the pain-relieving effect produced by acupuncture is reversed by administering naloxone. This causes the patient to start feeling the pain again.

This proves that acupuncture causes the natural release of endorphins by the brain which can be reversed by naloxone. This analgesic effect is found to last for more than an hour after acupuncture procedure. This can be shown by recording the neural activity directly in the thalamus or the pain processing site of the monkey's brain.

The overlap between the nervous system and the acupuncture points is also large. The sites where the acupuncture induced analgesia acts is confirmed to be the thalamus which is where the emotional pain and suffering is processed.

This is done using the non invasive functional magnetic resonance imaging or the fMRI, the positron emission tomography or the PET, brain imaging techniques and also through the feedback pathway from the cerebral cortex.

The cerebral cortex is where the cognitive feedback signal to the thalamus distinguishes whether the pain is noxious or painful or innocuous or not harmful. This is done using the electrophysiological recording of the nerve impulses of the neurons in the cortex. This shows inhibitory action during the acupuncture procedure when stimulus was applied.

Recent research on acupuncture has also proven that acupuncture increases the nitric oxide levels in the areas that have been treated. Consequently, there is an increase in the blood circulation in that area.

Risks Involved –

There are a few adverse effects of acupuncture therapy according to a survey by Ernst et al. This survey performed over 400 patients receiving around 3500 acupuncture treatments found some adverse effects of this treatment.

They include –

- Minor bleeding at the site of needle insertion after removal of the needle. Just holding a ball of cotton over the site is usually enough to stop this bleeding. This was found in about three percent of the patients undergoing treatment.
- Hematoma was found to manifest in around two percent of the patients undergoing treatment in the form of bruises. This usually went away after a few days.
- Dizziness is another effect seen in about one percent of the patients. This is due to the patient's subconscious fear of needles. Patients are normally made to lie down during treatment. This reduces the risk of the patient fainting.

This survey concluded that just like any other therapeutic approach, acupuncture also has a few adverse effects. It is a safe procedure if used according to established safety rules and at appropriate regions.

Apart from these, there are certain other risks of injury due to the insertion of acupuncture needles like –

- Injury to the nerves due to accidental puncturing.
- Rare cases of brain damage or even stroke due to deep needling at the base of the patient's skull.
- Condition called Pneumothorax due to deep needling into the patient's lungs.
- Damage to the kidney due to deep needling in the lower back.
- Puncture of the protective membrane covering the heart also called the Haemopericardium. This may occur due to needling over the sternal foramen which is actually a hole in the breastbone occurring due to congenital defect.
- Risk of termination of pregnancy by using certain accupoints which have been proven to stimulate production of adrenocorticotropic hormone or ACTH and Oxytocin.

These risks can be avoided by making sure you go to a well trained acupuncturist who knows his job.

Another risk factor is when the patient depends entirely on acupuncture treatment and omits going to a allopathic doctor. According to some doctors, doing this could be risky as disease which is not diagnosed on time may worsen and lead to complications.

This is the reason doctors advice going in for acupuncture as a complementary therapy rather than an alternative therapy.

Apart from this, there is also the risk of patients getting conned by unethical or naïve practitioners who try to exhaust the patient's resources by giving them ineffective treatment.

However there are remote chances of this happening because almost all countries these days have recognized the benefits of acupuncture and have instituted regulatory measures thereby raising the level of this procedure.

Comparing the safety aspect of acupuncture to other treatments, the NIH consensus has stated that adverse side effects of acupuncture are very low, much lower than conventional treatments.

Political Status and Legalities –

In many countries, acupuncturists are also allowed to practice herbal medicine also known as tui na. Alternately, they may be allopathic doctors practicing medical acupuncture in a simplified form.

License for this is regulated by the state or province in different countries and this requires the passing of a board examination.

United States –

Licensed acupuncturists in the United States are also known as “L.Ac”. In florida they are called the Acupuncture Physicians and are given the status of a primary care physician.

The more conservative state of Illinois, acupuncturists need to be referred to by a medical practitioner until now. However the situation is changing now as the acupuncturists are being allowed to practice without reference from a medical doctor.

Acupuncturists holding a “Dipl.Ac.” or the “Diplomate of Acupuncture” certificate, are certified by the board of the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

There are other professional masters degrees offered in acupuncture like the “M.Ac.” or Masters in Acupuncture, “M.S.Ac.” or the Masters of Science in Acupuncture, “M.S.O.M” or the Masters of Science in Oriental Medicine and “M.A.O.M” or the Masters of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.

Other available degree courses include the “O.M.D.” or the Doctor of Oriental Medicine and “C.M.D” or the Doctor in Chinese Medicine though these two degrees are not recognized by the Accreditation Commission for the “ Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine” also known as (ACAOM).

The practice of acupuncture is thereby regulated by each state within the limits of its field. The ACAOM has begun the accreditation of the new and terminal degree in this field called the “Doctor of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine” or the DAOM.

A few colleges and universities like the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine and the Bastyr University are among the first institutions in the United States offering this degree. This degree is estimated to replace all the master’s level programs in the United States within the next ten years.

Acupuncture in the USA is generally practiced by health care providers. Though a lot of them are licensed acupuncturists specializing in Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, there are others who are physicians, dentists and chiropractors practicing this procedure with lesser training.

A licensed practitioner generally undergoes between 2500 and 4000 hours of training in Chinese medical theory, acupuncture and basic biosciences. They may also sometimes receive training in Chinese herbology and bodywork.

Practitioners are tested by The National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine to make sure they are well read about Chinese Medicine and other sterile techniques.

Though a lot of states require this licensing, each state is governed by its own laws. There are states where an aspiring acupuncturist has to work with an M.D. for a stipulated period of time even if the M.D. may not have any training in this field.

In America, acupuncture is becoming widely popular. Around sixty percent of the doctors already regard this procedure as effective if used along with allopathic treatments.

The Food and Drug Administration in the year 1996 raised the status of acupuncture needles from Class III to Class II medical devices. This means that these needles are certified to be safe and effective when used properly by licensed practitioners.

Canada –

In Canada, the laws governing the practice of acupuncture are approved and passed by the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia.

Ontario –

In Ontario, the regulations on the practice of acupuncture are set by the Traditional Chinese Medicine Act of 2006. The government of Ontario is in the process of establishing a College that will be responsible for overseeing the policy regarding implementations and regulations related to this field.

TCM practitioners are allowed to call themselves “Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine”. They are also permitted to inform the patient about what is diagnosed after diagnosing a condition based on Traditional Chinese Medicine techniques.

Health care professionals like chiropractors, physiotherapists, massage therapists, dentists, physicians, naturopaths, etc are allowed to perform acupuncture procedures after having fulfilled the educational requirements set by the regulatory colleges.

United Kingdom –

In this country, there is the British Acupuncture Council or the BAAC. The members of this council observe the Code of Safe Practice regarding hygiene standards and sterilization of equipment.

Members of this council make sure all of them use disposable needles which are pre-sterilized. Similar safety standards are followed by most governing bodies in the United States and Australia.

The British Acupuncture Council is another council which has a number of registered acupuncture practitioners as its members. Most of them belong to the British Medical Acupuncture Society or the BMAS.

The BMAS publishes a quarterly journal called "Acupuncture in Medicine". Acupuncturists in the UK differ in their opinions regarding the degree to which traditional acupuncture concepts like the meridians and qi are taken into account.

Others who do not believe in the traditional concepts concentrate on palpable "trigger points".

Apart from these, there are other acupuncture groups in the UK like the British Academy of Western Medical Acupuncture or the BAWMA which trains nurses in the acupuncture procedures, the Acupuncture Association of Chartered Physiotherapists or the AACP and qualified ear acupuncturists who are trained in restricted practice like NADA and SMART or full ear acupuncture like EAR and SAA.

Though various councils in the UK claim to be the regulating body in that country, there is no statutory regulatory body at present in the United Kingdom for acupuncture. The UK government though has plans to set up a regulatory council by the year 2010.

Australia –

Acupuncture in Australia is also regulated and governed by different governing bodies in different states.

The year 2000 saw an independent government agency being established to oversee the practice of Chinese Herbal Medicine and Acupuncture in the State of Victoria.

There is a Chinese Medicine Registration Board in Victoria which proposes to protect the interests of the public. They do this by making sure that all acupuncture and Chinese medicine practitioners are qualified and experienced.

According to the legislation put in place, the following titles can be used only by practitioners who are registered by the state – Acupuncture, Chinese Herbal medicine, Chinese Medicine, Registered Chinese Herbal Medicine Practitioner, Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioner, Registered Acupuncturist, etc.

In the state of New South Wales, a investigating report on the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine was commissioned by the Parliamentary Committee on Health Care complaints commission.

Based on this a recommendation was made to introduce a registration board appointed by the government to restrict the use of titles like “acupuncturist”, “Chinese herbal medicine practitioner”, “Chinese medicine practitioner”, etc in order to regulate the profession.

The purpose of doing this is to make sure the public is protected from the risks involved with acupuncture by ensuring a high level of competency and education of registered acupuncturists. This is done by enforcing certain guidelines with regard to continuing professional education and also looking into complaints of the conduct of the practitioner.

This kind of a registration board at present is operative in the state of Victoria. This board actually holds more power than the local councils with respect to regulating and enforcing compliance with legal requirements and also with regards to investigating complaints and enforcing punishment for misconduct.

Apart from these two states, other states in Australia have their own acupuncture acts. Some of the conditions stipulated in this act include that the needles used should be a “single use” needle and should never be reused under any circumstances.

If using any other type of needle for treatment, it has to be sterilized in the appropriate method before using it on patients.

What is Acupoint Therapy?

Acupoint Therapy can be defined as an extension of Willy Penzel's modern APM system or the Akupunkt Massage. This therapy is nothing but stimulation of the acupuncture points and the meridians using a stick called the therapy stick.

Though there is no sufficient evidence scientifically as to how effective this therapy is, it is slowly gaining in popularity. Sweden is one of the countries where this therapy is quite widespread.

This therapy also originates from the Chinese Medicine based on the meridians or the energy pathways in the body. According to the accupoint therapists, meridians which are known to be the "Yin" correspond to the parasympathetic nervous system in the body.

Therefore, when these meridians are stimulated, it relaxes the person by slowing the heart, reducing the blood pressure, releasing the knots in the muscles, etc. On the other hand, the "Yang" meridians when stimulated increase the sympathetic nervous system activities. This increases the tension and heart beat rate, increases the blood pressure and produces more contractions in the muscles.

The aim or Accupoint Therapy is to bring about a balance between the Yin and Yang that is between the parasympathetic and the sympathetic forces.

Therapy Stick –

The accupoint therapy stick looks more like those used by the dentists. It has a small ball at the end with around a diameter of 2mm.

Stimulating the meridian with the help of the stick causes something called Vasodilation. When you run the stick along your inner forearm you will see a line on your hand. This is called the vasoconstriction.

Sometimes the therapists also stimulate points rather than lengths of the meridian.

Accupressue –

Acupressure is another offshoot of acupuncture and is based on similar ideas. This is also a traditional Chinese medicine or TCM technique which is all about applying pressure physically by hand or the elbow or even with the help of devices. Pressure is applied on acupuncture points on the body surface.

As of now there is no scientific evidence on how effective the procedure of acupressure is. Acupressure has its origin in the East Asian Martial Arts which makes use of this for health and for self defense.

These points or a combination of these points are used to attack and manipulate the opponents during a fight. Martial artists treat themselves by massaging the acupressure points to remove blocks in their meridians.

They claim that this increases the circulation of energy and also provides them with flexibility by maintaining the softness of these points and also to make them less vulnerable to attacks.

It is generally assumed that the procedure of Accupressure works by releasing certain endogenous opioid or analgesics like endorphin, enkephalin and dynorphins. This results in reduction of pain in that part. One advantage of this procedure is that it is very safe and rarely has any side effects.

Tapas Acupressure Technique –

This is a technique for weight loss maintenance. A trial supported by a grant from the National Center for Complementary/Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health, USA has proved that this technique is the most effective for weight loss than any other technique.

Another procedure which has been extensively investigated and found to be effective is the use of acupressure wristband for treatment of motion sickness and nausea symptoms.

The P6 acupressure point is stimulated by this band. According to Cochrane Collaboration which is a group of Evidence Based Medicine review, using the P6 for nausea and vomiting is very effective. This is used more during post operative periods to reduce nausea.

Another study by the Cochrane Collaboration showed that long term relief from lower back pain was got by massaging that part. This review states that the acupressure point massage provides more effective relief to the patient than the traditional Swedish massage.

Open Angle Glaucoma Treatment With Acupuncture –

Open angle Glaucoma is a condition which is prevalent in a lot of people. This condition occurs due to an increase in the Intraocular Pressure or the IOP due to the congestion of the eye drainage canals.

This build-up of the fluids in the eye damages the retina and the optic nerve. Glaucoma can be detected early if you have been having regular eye check ups. IOP is frequently measure with the help of a “tonometer” and a vision field test will detect immediately any kind of a loss of vision.

IOP as such is not easily felt by the patient in the early stages. Sometimes, by the time the patient becomes aware of his problem, he may have gone in for a considerable vision loss for which he may be prescribed the usual eye drops by the conventional medicine. These drops help to reduce the IOP by trying to keep the pressure in the eye low.

According to TCM, the condition of Chronic Open Angle Glaucoma is actually due to a deficiency in the liver kidney energy levels or the yin deficiency. Yang in the liver rises leading to this particular condition.

TCM suggests some acupuncture points in order to sedate the channels of the stomach and liver.

TCM helps us identify the origin of a lot of diseases helping patients to recover from a lot of ailments. Glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy usually come with symptoms like loss of peripheral vision. This condition according to TCM is yin dominant and yang deficient. After establishing this, patients are usually examined to determine the channels and organs which are most affected.

Treatment Methods –

Open angle Glaucoma is usually treated by treating the UB, ST and GB channels. As GB is a yang channel, on stimulation, it delivers the qi from the liver to the eyes and upper body.

UB on the other hand is the water element channel which on stimulation will deliver the qi from the kidney to the upper body and eyes of the patient. Stimulating the stomach channels ensure that the spleen nutritive Yang qi is delivered to the eyes.

There are a lot of eye exercises which will be prescribed for the patient of TCM. One of them is to apply pressure under the eyeball using the middle finger upto ten seconds in and up and another ten seconds for the rest.

This exercise when done at least three times a day for three days in a row shows a lot of improvement in the condition.

Detoxification With Acupuncture –

The acupuncture procedure is very popular as a treatment for drug addiction or addiction to alcohol.

Michael Smith, MD of the Lincoln Memorial Hospital in the Bronx, NY developed a five point auricular or the outer ear protocol during the 1970s heroin plague. He however emphasizes that the auricular acupuncture treatment should only be complementary to the standard treatments and not an alternative.

Information about this protocol is available at the National Acupuncture Detoxification Association or the NADA in the US and also worldwide.

According to “Accupunture today” which is one of the trade journals for acupuncturists NADA was established in the year 1985. Since then, it has been training more than ten thousand “acupuncture detoxification specialists” in the use of this five point protocol.

Evidence regarding effectiveness of this protocol is anecdotal and based on clinical reports.

Acupuncture as an Effective Drug Addiction Treatment –

Research and experiments regarding the use of acupuncture for treatment of drug addiction and detoxification has shown promising results. Anecdotal and clinical evidence has proved that acupuncture can be an effective weapon for people who are chemical dependent.

Acupuncture treatment has shown to alleviate withdrawal symptoms considerably. This has facilitated detoxification and has even motivated addicts not to drop out of the treatment.

In fact a lot of detoxification clinics have included acupuncture in their treatment regimes. The “drug courts” created by the court systems in major cities of the US

have devised an intensive program for counselling and treatment. These programs also sometimes include acupuncture in their format.

Approach and methods being totally different from the Western medicine, it is difficult to synthesize acupuncture and the American addiction treatment. Westerners are very sceptical about the effectiveness of this procedure.

Western medicine of late has been realizing the significance of the effectiveness of acupuncture in pain management. Though it has taken considerable time for the west to understand the Chinese concept of the invisible qi or the life energy flowing through the invisible meridians, the importance of treating diseases with acupuncture as a complementary procedure is gaining popularity.

This acceptance has also been aided by recent research which has proven that the procedure of acupuncture stimulates the production of beta endorphins in the body.

Another important discovery which popularised acupuncture in the West is that of the French doctor Paul Nogier in the year 1955. He discovered that every traditional acupuncture point on the body has a corresponding point on the ear.

Auricular acupuncture thus gained popularity as this procedure did not require privacy. A lot of patients can be treated simultaneously in the same room without any problem especially in case of drug detoxification.

In case of drug addiction, conclusive scientific evidence is not available. A study by Milton L. Bullock in the British Journal "The Lancet" concludes that acupuncture is highly effective in the treatment of alcoholism.

This conclusion was arrived at by conducting acupuncture treatments on severe recidivist alcoholics and treatment group patients.

An analysis of the available research reports on acupuncture as a part of the detoxification protocol was done and the results were published in the "Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment".

This analysis was based on seven experiments conducted on animals. These experiments proved that acupuncture effectively reduces withdrawal symptoms in animals.

Acupuncture, though does not have a physiological cure for drug addiction, certainly gives the patient a soothing and relaxed feeling which is extremely helpful for them to handle the stress of the lifestyle change.

One of the very famous detoxification clinics in New York City, U.S uses the procedure of acupuncture in its treatment regime.

The motivation to do this came in the form of a neurosurgeon in Hong Kong Dr. H.L.Wen who noticed a radical reduction in the symptoms of withdrawal in opiate addicted patients to whom he had been regularly giving acupuncture treatment.

Lincoln Clinic decided to carry out some experiments with this procedure. Until then they had been a methadone clinic. Conviction over the outcome of these experiments led this clinic to develop a certain protocol which they have taught to around 500 clinicians and implemented in 150 programs over the years.

The standard protocols of the eminent Lincoln Clinic revolve around four main as well as significant tools to help addicts to recover –

- Acupuncture detoxification
- Urine testing
- Individual counselling
- Group based therapy involving 12 steps

According to Smith the director of Lincoln Clinic, advantages of incorporating acupuncture with their traditional treatment are numerous. The most important of these advantages is that with acupuncture, there is a cessation of the withdrawal symptoms in the patients which encourages them to come back for further treatment.

Smith further states that according to statistics, pregnant women with a history of abusing crack cocaine who are undergoing acupuncture treatment give birth to babies of higher weight than those who do not.

Furthermore, a clinic in Delaware using the Lincoln Clinic protocol for treatment reported that a seven-day in-patient drug treatment oriented program saw a decline in the recidivism rates from 87% to 18% one year after the date of admission.

Dr. Smith observes that the acupuncture procedure actually forges a kind of a bond between the doctor and the patient prior to any kind of agreement or conversations. One major advantage is that acupuncture does not require cooperation from the patient in contrast to verbal communication where a patient may feel angry or in denial or even intimidated and may resort to lying.

Dr. Smith says according to the patients, acupuncture allows them to feel relaxed yet alert. The methadone treatment affects the patient's body's need for the drug whereas acupuncture affects the patient's state of mind during withdrawal.

What the Judges say.....

The phenomenal accomplishments of Lincoln Clinic has forced eminent judges like Judge Herbert Klein who belongs to the illustrious Eleventh Judicial Circuit in the State of Florida as well as Chief Judge Gerald Weatherington, the founders of the first ever drug court in the country in Dade County, Florida to rethink on their strategies.

Weatherington and Klein were then facing insurmountable problems with over crowded jails and a high rate of recidivism among the drug offenders. The Dade County Drug Court started accepting arrestees in the year 1989.

The court allows people who face charges of possessing or buying drugs to go in for intensive treatment for drug addiction. Arrestees who do not cooperate have to be threatened to undergo at least the outpatient treatment. This treatment may even include acupuncture.

Arrestees are given the incentive that if they complete the course of treatment their charges will be dropped. Though statistics are not very conclusive, the rearrest rates for those who served jail sentence were around sixty percent while for those who were graduates of the drug court was eleven percent.

Acupuncture is only one part of the Drug Court in Dade County or the District of Columbia. Administrators are strongly convinced that it is a very important part of the treatment.

The first part of the program involves helping the patient through detoxification with the help of acupuncture. Acupuncture is phased out as the patient continues stabilizing.

You will find that acupuncture is rarely used in post-medical care, as the program continues with programs related to building a sense of self reliance with the help of education and providing them with GED courses as well as vocational therapy.

We can therefore conclude that though the effectiveness of acupuncture treatment is largely anecdotal it is clearly an important part of the future. Its importance is clear in a number of ways. In spite of this, acupuncture is considered strongly as an alternate medicine.

The Food and Drug Administration ruling in the year 1970 that acupuncture needles should be classified as “experimental” medical devices was a blow to the acupuncture industry.

This was because the insurance companies, Medicaid and Medicare hesitate to make payments for treatments which are still at the experimental level. After having petitioning the FDA in the year 1994, leading acupuncturists are still waiting for the review of the ruling.

Notwithstanding all this, acupuncture is able to get a widespread attention all over.

Other important studies in acupuncture include the one by Dr. Herbert Kleber of the Columbia University’s “Center Of Addiction And Substance Abuse”.

This study which will be on a large scale on how effective acupuncture is in treating drug addiction is expected to provide information on the usefulness of acupuncture in the treatment of drug addiction.

Auriculotherapy –

Auriculotherapy or auricular therapy commonly known as the ear acupuncture is a form of alternative medicine which is based on the principle or idea that the ear or the auricle represents the entire human body.

In other words the ear is a microsystem and by stimulating the surface of the ear, the entire body can be treated successfully.

History of auriculotherapy –

Dr. Paul Nogier in the 1950s noticed a healer in Lyon, France treating sciatica by cauterizing a part of the ear.

This motivated him to investigate the relationship between the human anatomy and locations on the ear.

According to Nogier, the ear was shaped like the inverted fetus. In other words, there is a certain somatotopic-presentation of the seemingly inverted foetus that lies in the ear. He also said specific areas in the ear correspond to various anatomic foetus regions.

Nogier also strongly believed that needling, electrically stimulating, massaging or cauterising a particular area in the ear will relieve pain in that corresponding anatomical area of the body.

Nogier named this process auriculotherapy and this has been used in combined therapies for substance abuse and also as a treatment for pain relief.

Vascular Autonomic Sign –

One thing that was noticed was the distinct change in the dimension or amplitude of the pulse on stimulation of certain points on the auricle. This occurrence was consistent and was both repeated and measured with the help of modern equipments.

This was named as the Vascular Autonomic Sign or VAS by Nogier. For successful implementation of Auriculotherapy and Auriculomedicine, it is very important to employ VAS for diagnosis and treatment accurately.

Auriculotherapy compared to Acupuncture

According to auriculotherapy, the ear is a reflex system which is connected directly to the Central Nervous System. Ear acupuncture on the other hand consists of accupoints which are known for their specific functions.

Contrary to some claims, auriculotherapy is also performed using either needles, massage, electrical stimulation or laser at points which have been accurately detected by VAS or the electrical detection.

Map of the Ear –

There are a lot of different maps existing for auriculotherapy. The “somatotopic” map was proposed first by Nogier. According to this, the body is represented as the inverted the inverted foetus of the ear. The head is towards the ‘lower-lobule’, the feet at the topmost region of the auricle as well as the body that lies in the middle.

He further developed three “phase” diagrams that provided more information and also alternate sets of locations for stimulation. According to him, this was because the part or a region of the ear in question representing a particular organ varies according to the “phase” of the ailment.

Electroacupuncture

In the electroacupuncture procedure, the acupuncture needles are attached to a device from which continuous electrical pulses are generated. This in turn generates a small electric current which flows between two needles. This is also referred to as Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation or PENS.

Acupuncturists feel that this practice requires regular use of acupuncture. This procedure is also capable of restoring health and well being of the patient and is very good for treatment of pain.

This procedure has been found to be very effective in treatment of post chemotherapy vomiting.

Procedure –

“Accupunture today”, a trade journal for acupuncturists states that electroacupuncture is quite similar to traditional acupuncture. Stimulation points are the same and just like in traditional acupuncture, the needles have to be inserted all along the specific points of the body.

These needles are attached to the device that generates pulses that are electric in nature by making use of small clips. These devices can also be used to modify the frequency as well as the intensity of the impulse. This is determined based on the condition the patient is being treated for.

Electroacupuncture requires compulsory use of two needles as the current has to pass from one needle to the other. Multiple needle-pairs can be used simultaneously stimulated but the duration should not be more than thirty minutes at a time.

This article also states that according to the TCM principle, a person falls ill when the qi in his body is not flowing in an evenly distributed manner; Acupuncturists identify the stimulation points by finding out whether the qi is weak, out of balance or stagnant.

Electroacupuncture is very effective in conditions where there is accumulated qi as in chronic pain conditions or in cases where it is difficult to stimulate the qi.

Electroacupuncture is commonly known as EA, and also generally referred to as electrotherapy. This procedure is used as a replacement for manual stimulation of the accupoints.

Apart from this, electroacupuncture is also applied using the neurophysiological model. This means that practitioners who use the traditional acupuncture points also try to induce a therapeutic response by mapping neuronal pathways and cutaneous and spinal distributions.

Quick acting analgesia is achieved by applying high frequency electroacupuncture. This is done by using the segmental theory thereby blocking the pain signals from reaching the mind.

The analgesic effect causes the release of beta endorphins and enkephalins and is long lasting. Body mechanism is thus harnessed and utilized to control the pain and also provide relief from pain and suffering.

Apart from pain relief, electroacupuncture is also used for treating muscle dysfunction and musculoskeletal trauma. These are injuries caused by over use like spasms, sprains and dysfunction. Electroacupuncture is also increasingly used for treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee.

Acupuncture Computerized-

The device called AcuGraph 2.1 Professional is a meridian evaluating system offering Digital Meridian Imaging. It is a revolutionary device in the world of modern acupuncture.

AcuGraph is actually a skilful integration of traditional acupuncture practice and modern technology. This makes treatment with acupuncture easier and effective.

AcuGraph is actually something like a lab test for acupuncture which provides exam data based on evidence and point selection.

How Acugraph Works.....

The whole testing procedure is only two minutes and can even be performed by the office assistant effortlessly.

The first step involves measuring each meridian with AcuGraph's computerized measurement probe guided point by point by the computer.

The second step just involves watching the AcuGraph providing a graphical analysis and interpretation of the meridian energetics, including the yin and yang, five elements, horary and complete symptomatic associations, all this in a format easily understood by the patients.

The third step involves treating the patient based on the AcuGraph's interpretations. Even the supplementary treatments to be given to the patient with secondary acupoints, auriculotherapy and verbal reflexes are all determined and recommended by the software.

Finally, the results can be monitored and tracked by subsequent examinations using AcuGraph. This device thus gives you evidence based acupuncture tracking and documentation.

AcuGraph is a device widely used by the practitioners all over the world. These practitioners include the Acupuncturists, Chiropractors, Medical doctors, Naturopaths, Dentists, etc.

Acugraph 2.1 Professional provides the patient with a choice of timed measurement of each point which is automatic. It also provides manual measurement for even more accurate control of the measurement process.

The reading is taken without having to touch the device like pressing a button. This makes sure the probe is not accidentally touched wherein there are chances of the pressure and angle changing. This makes sure the reading is absolutely accurate.

The timed reading mode enables you to take all measurements at intervals timed by the computer. This ensures consistency in measurement. The manual reading mode enables you to move the probe across the point required to find the maximum plateau before the reading is taken.

The point detection feature makes sure you find the exact point all the time. One more feature which is advantageous is that this device does not need the use of a battery.

AcuGraph uses voltage which is safe, consistent and microprocessor regulated from the computer's USB port for absolute reliability and accuracy.

Speed of operation is another attractive feature of this equipment. Meridian graphing is done the fastest on AcuGraph. The measurements which are recorded by the probe are instantly and automatically fed into the software and a second after the last measurement is recorded the interpretation is ready.

Last but not the least, AcuGraph enables you to easily take all the twenty four measurements and also receive the interpretation, treatment points and the graph within ninety seconds. This saves a lot of time for both the practitioner and the patient.

AcuGraph focuses on using effective points for the meridian balancing protocols. This ensures the use of few but effective treatment points for every patient. Another thing is this device's intelligent logic engine considers all treatment options and suggests the best mode of treatment in a split second.

AcuGraph thus provides for a faster, comfortable and effective treatment by reducing the number of treatment points. This is done by including the Five Elements analysis of each patient's chart along with musculo tendino and special effect points.

Another thing that this device does is to add enhanced treatment recommendations which are exclusive like the Auriculotherapy points, associated points, vertebral reflexes, etc.

Furthermore AcuGraph is very simple and intuitive and effectively guides the physician through each and every step of assessment and treatment of the patient.

This device provides around 450 colour photos, written descriptions of each point and illustrations. With just a click you can access the ready reference section of the software. This enables even a novice to operate this machine like a professional.

One more thing is that installing and using the AcuGraph does not require you to be an expert at computers. This is the most flexible system providing source and point analysis, Tsing point analysis and the traditional 'Ryodoraku-point' analysis at the click of the mouse.

AcuGraph system is long lasting with its on probe memory which is redundant and its gold tip which is triple plated and 24 carat gold plated.

This system guarantees trouble free service due to the high quality of materials used and due to it being carefully engineered. Last but not the least this equipment is absolutely computer compatible and can be used with Windows 98 (SE), ME, 2000 and XP, Macintosh OS x10.2, etc.

Acupressure Cupping –

Acupuncture that is not sans needles is done by acupressure cupping.

Acupuncture can be done without the use of needles using special acupressure cups that work on principles of magnetism and work by using suction force. This procedure is safe and effective since there is no insertion of needle, use of electricity or burning.

The suction cups when used on the acupuncture points and meridians act like the acupuncture needles. The bulb has to be squeezed between the fingers and put on the accupoint or the sensitive points on the skin.

The bulb then has to be released to the required pressure. Pressure should be released enough to enable the bulb to stay on the point to do acupuncture automatically.

These bulbs come in four sizes – small, medium, large and extra large. There are also two kinds of Acu Magnet Tablet Heads – North Pole N and South Pole S. The head of the Acu magnet tablet is used to perform acupuncture from inside the cup for points too small to put the cup on.

Following are a few benefits of Acupuncture Cupping –

- Safety – In contrast to needles which have to be punctured under the skin, the cups are just sucked on to the skin. This reduces the risk of injuries or infection to a great extent.
- Simple to use – using acupuncture needles is either by hand or by electricity. This needs more experience and practice for accuracy. Cupping on the other hand uses the negative pressure in order to stimulate the acupoints and the meridians. They are thus very simple and easy to use.
- Lesser pain – Acupuncture needles may sometimes cause pain or bleeding if handled improperly. There is no risk of this in acupuncture cupping.
- Acupuncture can be done using the Magnetic Tablet Head in acupoints which are very small.
- Cost Factor – While the acupuncture needles have to be changed every time or have to be disposable, the acupuncture cups can be used again and again for a long time.

Special Acupuncture Footwear –

Acupuncture footwear is a special kind of footwear used for treatment of ailments which are related to the foot. Foot ailments are of various types. The most common reasons for foot ailments are improper function of the foot or poor posture.

Apart from this another widespread reason for foot ailments is the wrong selection and improper use of the footwear. Wrong selection of footwear includes shoes which are stiff thereby causing strain and stress on the feet.

Shoes which are loose cause friction due to the rubbing of the foot and slipping. Another common reason includes excessive use and disorders due to exercises.

Acupuncture is very effective in relieving various types of foot pain. Acupuncture footwear was basically developed for providing relief from foot related ailments. A lot of people have made acupuncture footwear an integral part of their day to day life.

Holiday Acupuncture Gifts –

Gifts related to acupuncture being unique and novel are gaining in popularity. These gifts are all over the internet attracting the alternate medical field especially the acupuncturists.

Gifts available at these shops include attractive T-shirts, hats, bags, accessories, etc which are considered to be “healthy” gifting ideas. They act as a reminder not to forget your acupuncture treatment.

These shops have more impact on the acupuncture profession as they promote and create awareness about this procedure.

Acupuncture for Animals –

Veterinary acupuncture is gaining popularity all over the world. Here is an interesting experience of the North Carolina Veterinarian William Martin. In the year 1985, he signed up for a course on animal acupuncture offered by the International Veterinary Acupuncture Society or the IVAS.

This was a four day course held once a month for a period of four months at the end of which a certificate test was held. This course started with introduction to Chinese history and theory of acupuncture like the yin and yang, meridians and alarm points.

Dr. William Martin found this extremely irrelevant and boring and almost decided not to go back to the course. When he reached home, he found to his alarm that his five year old miniature Dachshund was paralyzed for the past five days due to a problem in the intervertebral disc. Western treatments did not help in any way.

In this desperate situation Dr.Martin decided to try the acupuncture and called up one of his course instructors for suggestions. With the instructor's guidance,

Dr.Martin over the telephone learnt how to insert the regular hypodermic needles in the acupuncture points.

To his delight and surprise, he found the Dachshund up and about within four hours of treatment. This was the first miracle experienced by Dr.Martin. He went on to continue the course. Dr.Martin's story is one among the many anecdotes attesting to the effectiveness of acupuncture in treatment of animals.

History of Animal Acupuncture –

It is very difficult to determine the exact date or period of the origin of acupuncture practices on animals. The earliest record of veterinary acupuncture was around three

thousand years ago in India. Elephants were treated then with some sort of a similar method.

Shun Yang (480 BC) of China was considered to be the father of Veterinary medicine.

With the growing popularity of acupuncture in human medicine since the 1970s, veterinary acupuncture has also moved closer to mainstream practices. Major veterinary texts include chapters on acupuncture now.

In fact throughout the world acupuncture has gained popularity and has become a business to reckon with. Statistics show around three million veterinary doctors, pharmacists, medical practitioners and assistants worldwide are fully trained in acupuncture.

Out of this around 150,000 of them are veterinarians and 700,000 are paraveterinary assistants. The main professional society for veterinary acupuncturists in the United States is the IVAS which has a website and also publishes journals and newsletters.

As the human acupuncture practice the veterinary acupuncture also evolved from the Traditional Chinese Medicine. According to TCM, humans and animals are small parts of the infinite universe.

Everyone is governed by the laws which govern the various living and non living things in the universe. Their basic concept states that whether it is the animal or the human, if the laws of nature are followed, good health automatically follows.

Practically Speaking.....

Supposing you have a canine who has been having “accidents” in the house and has been previously trained, you need to look into the matter and take him or her to the Vet.

If you take her to a Western clinician, he will tend to ask you questions like how frequently your dog urinates inside the house, what is the quantity of urine, etc. Your

pet will then be placed on the examination table and examined for any masses in the stomach.

The vet will also listen to the heart and bowel sounds to determine whether there is any medical problem associated with the symptoms. You will then be suggested by your vet perform certain lab tests in order to rule out any infection in the urinary tract. The canine is also tested for possible diabetes mellitus and diabetes insipidus.

In contrast, if you present the same symptoms to a TCM trained vet, he will ask you questions related to the behaviour of your dog including previous history. He will also ask questions like what time of the day does it happen more frequently, does your pet sleep in the sun or seeks out a shady, cool spot, does she lie on a soft surface or prefers to sleep on firm surfaces, etc.

All these questions may seem unrelated and you may become impatient but we must remember that to a traditional practitioner of TCM, these are all valid questions as the patient whether a dog or a human is a living being and an individual with physical, emotional and mental components.

Various questions are asked to assess the individual as a whole. While his questions are being answered, the TCM practitioner continuously observes and assesses the dog's behaviour in the room.

He checks her tongue, examines the shape of the dog's body, and examines her coat and skin. The dog is further examined in the chest for breathing sounds and the character of her bark is assessed.

As in the western clinic, the TCM practitioner examines the patient's abdomen and limbs. The dog's pulse is then checked and specific areas at the sides, abdomen and back are assessed as these points correspond to specific organs.

As a final step, the TCM practitioner smells the animal for specific odors in the eyes, ears, mouth and nose as an important part of the diagnostic process.

Procedure –

If any serious urinary ailments are ruled out and if your pet is diagnosed with “oestrogen-responsive” atrophy of the muscles of the bladder-wall, the conventional vet, will in all probability, prescribe DES or diethylstilbestrol, which is a synthetic oestrogen in order to maintain the bladder tone.

DES though commonly prescribed has a lot of side effects like skin problems, liver problems and even tumors in the mammary. TCM however will treat each patient differently and will view frequent urination as a limitation in the ‘kidney-yang’.

This causes a deficiency in the qi or the energy of the pet. They also view this inconsistency as a function of qi associated with the spleen. This is because spleen is considered to be an important organ which keeps other organs functioning properly and can be stimulated to treat conditions like herniations, prolapses, etc.

Your canine therefore would most probably be treated by a TCM practitioner with acupuncture which will stimulate certain anatomic loci along the bladder, spleen and kidney meridians.

Needle size depends mainly on the point location and the size of the animal being treated. Areas which are bony like the head or face are treated with needles which are short or about 0.5 inches in length.

Common size of the needle used for treatment of animals is about one inch. Longer needles are available for dogs which are bigger in size. These needles are around 1.5 to 2.0 inches long. They are also flexible and solid and vets use presterilized disposable needles on request.

When the procedure is done by an experienced acupuncturist, the animal usually does not experience any kind of a discomfort. A trained and experienced clinician will handle the needles deftly inserting them at a proper angle and depth and also manipulate them accurately during the treatment.

This requires a lot of practice. This is one of the reasons why it is better to go to a trained physician.

Under normal circumstances, effect of the treatment can be seen after the third sitting. In order to know if the acupuncture therapy is effective or not you may have to bring your pet for at least four to eight sessions.

Duration of treatment can be anywhere between ten seconds to thirty minutes and is given normally once or twice a week. For a condition like arthritis, treatment may be fixed at once every six months and for some other conditions, it may also be once in two months. Frequency and duration of treatment thus depends on the animal and the ailment he or she is suffering from.

Just as in humans, acupuncture is a therapy which is very effective when used in conjunction with allopathic treatments for various conditions in canines.

According to studies conducted in both human and dogs, acupuncture was found to be really effective in cases where even anti inflammatory medicines and analgesics are ineffective.

Studies also revealed that acupuncture makes treatment with antibiotics more effective for canine otitis crises. According to reports, many conditions for canines have been treated very effectively with the help of acupuncture.

These include cardiovascular disorders, dermatological disorders, chronic respiratory conditions gynaecological disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, male reproductive disorders, reproductive disorders, neurological disorders, cervical disc disease, thoracolumbar disease, etc.

Just as in human acupuncture for dogs are decided individually based on the condition and need of each dog. Conditions that require surgery are often treated with acupuncture to see if surgery could be avoided.

Vet's opinion should be sought regarding treating the animal with veterinary disorders with acupuncture before going in for it as he would be in a position to assess whether acupuncture will complement the conventional medical treatment or not.

This is because sometimes there are situations where acupuncture may not be as effective and even should not be used. One such situation is when the pets are over

anxious. They secrete excess adrenaline which counteracts the benefits of acupuncture.

Some medications prescribed by conventional medicine reduce the effect of acupuncture. For example if your pet is on corticosteroids, there is no use of giving acupuncture therapy.

For pets suffering from cancer, acupuncture on wrong points can actually trigger the cancerous growth. Considering all this, it is advisable to go to a vet who is both proficient in conventional medicine as well as trained in veterinary acupuncture if you are actually considering acupuncture as an alternate therapy for your pet.

The American Veterinary Medical Association in its “Guidelines for Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine” states that Acupuncture and Veterinary Acupuncture are part of the veterinary medicine.

These procedures should actually be viewed as surgical and/or medical techniques under the state veterinary practice act. They have also suggestion various educational programs for the veterinarians to undergo before they actually start the practice or acupuncture.

Just as in humans, pain in animals is also a double edged sword. While it may warn us of some problem in a lot of cases pain is as adverse, harmful and debilitating as the disease itself.

Chronic pains which are abnormal are usually in the central nervous system or the peripheral nerves resulting from damages within the pathways.

The pain protective mechanism warns of the damage by being activated by heat, mechanical or other stimuli depending on pain receptors which in turn transmit the impulse of pain to the CNS through the afferent nerve fibers.

As in the humans, even dogs can recognize pains with previous experiences and its perception of pain is influenced by it. For example, some breeds are more stoic than the others.

Pain perception is also different between the male and female breeds. Females are usually more tolerant and they have a much higher pain threshold. This is because of the presence of natural pain suppressing mechanism in the body.

This analgesic system is due to the presence of endogenous opiates like the endorphins. According to Western theories acupuncture instigates the production of these opiates or just blocks the transmission of pain.

Nerve fibers are of several types. Pain receptors are of three types. Mechanical and thermal pain receptors send stimuli which are transmitted over a large myelinated A-delta fiber at a speed of 30 m/second.

Receptors of other types give out impulses which travel at a speed of only 12 m/second on the C fibers. The A-alpha fibers which are responsible for giving us the correct idea of where exactly we stand in a 3-dimensional space and also about the present condition of our muscles and joints.

Alpha beta neurons are responsible for letting us feel subtle touches and bending of hairs. A-Beta and A-Alpha type of fibres give out impulses of the nerves much faster than the A-delta or C fibers.

The AP stimulation results in a sensory information which is non painful. This impulse travels along the A-beta fibers. When this information reaches the interneurons, a nerve transmission gate which blocks the conduction of the A-delta and C fibers is shut. These as we have seen are the slow travelling neurons.

This gate theory though does not explain the delayed effects of the treatment or the cross circulation study results i.e. studies where the circulation of two animals were connected and results were produced in both with the procedure conducted on one of them.

We can thus conclude from all this with the humoral theory which states that the process of acupuncture releases endogenous opiates which produces analgesia which is self induced.

Acupuncture activates the spinal cord center by stimulating certain afferent nerves. This also activates the middle centre of the brain as well as the hypothalamus region

that has the pituitary unit in it. All this in turn blocks the pain from being transmitted by releasing the endorphins or other types of analgesic neurotransmitters.

There is another theory too which suggests that the procedure of acupuncture may have effects which are localized vasodilatation. This explains why this procedure is more beneficial for disorders that deal with muscles as well as bones.

According to this theory, the blood vessels which are dilated by acupuncture eliminate the pain producing substances like bradykinin, prostaglandins and other products which are inflammatory.

Another theory is called the autonomic theory. According to this theory, the stimulation of the internal organs is possible by external acupuncture points which excite the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves. These are the nerves which regulate the autonomic nervous system.

Adding to all this confusion is the bioelectric theory. According to this theory, the meridians are current pathways and the acupoints are the amplifiers.

In general therefore, acupuncture points can be stimulated due to insertion of needles, applying pressure, cupping or applying heat through moxibustion, infrared, etc.

You can draw the following conclusions regarding your pet who requires treatment –

Acupuncture can be very beneficial as a complementary therapy.

If you choose to take your pet to an acupuncturist, choose a well experienced one.

If your pet did not respond well to Western medicine, there is absolutely no harm in trying acupuncture. There are cases where acupuncture has succeeded like no other therapy has.

Anecdotal Evidence –

Susan Thorpe-Vargas has a doctorate in immunology with a lab and chemistry background. During the course of her career she once came across fifteen horses suffering from chronic back pain.

These horses could not even function normally even though they had been undergoing treatment for a long time. These horses were then treated with acupuncture.

Treatment lasted for a duration of twenty minutes and was given around seven to nine times a week. At the end of the treatment she found that thirteen of those horses started normal activities without any pain whatsoever.

Another anecdote involves Andy the eleven year old Siberian Husky. Due to old age he suffers from lower back pain. He is taken for a run by his personal trainer once a week and even strengthens his hind leg in the doggy pool. That's not all; he is given a massage and a hot spa treatment regularly.

He is one of the many dogs in Japan who are pampered by their masters. Andy's mistress Aya Ashiya who is 50 dotes on her pet. She gives him a treatment of aromatherapy and acupuncture on a regular basis to keep him as healthy, comfortable and fit as possible.

Pet owners in Japan as in other parts of the world will actually do anything to keep their pets happy and healthy.

Another example of the gaining popularity of acupuncture treatment for pets especially in Japan is the case of the long haired Chihuahua who is eight years old. This pet goes to the Kamakura Genki Animal Hospital for acupuncture sessions twice a week.

He started this treatment after he was stuck with a severe back pain. This dog along with his owner travels two hours by the local train for these acupuncture sessions.

Rancho Bernardo the horse was diagnosed to be afflicted with a pus filled lesion in his brain. Antibiotics could not cure this infection and the doctors gave up on him. This was almost a given up case when fate brought him in contact with the equine acupuncturist Dr.Liz Wilbur.

Dr. Wilbur's first session with the horse involved watching the horse for all the symptoms of the disease and questioning the owner about the pet's medical history, treatments given so far, appetite, energy level, etc.

This was followed by inserting a variety of needles into specific acupoints. The horse immediately started relaxing with the body's own healing mechanism taking over as a response to acupuncture.

Treatment continued for five months combining antibiotics with a Chinese herbal formula along with acupuncture. After six treatments spanning five months, the horse completely recovered and his gait returned to normal.

Acupuncture has been practiced on animals for centuries. Initially the Chinese used their acupuncture therapies to treat horses and thereafter they started experimenting on other domestic animals such as dogs, cats and birds and veterinary acupuncture is a widely prevalent practice today.

Microacupuncture –

Microacupuncture is a system by itself. It does not have anything to do with the existing acupuncture system. It works on acupuncture points which are discovered newly and are 48 in number.

These points are located on the hands and feet. This procedure was conceived in Denmark in the year 1984. Microacupuncture is mainly used to treat various eye conditions which have been diagnosed medically.

These conditions include the Macular degeneration, Diabetic Retinopathy, Stargardt's Syndrome, Retinitis Pigmentosa, Optic Nerve Atrophy, Retinal Bleeding, etc.

Though this treatment has proved to be quite successful, the success rate depends on the age of the patient and how well the patient responds to the treatment. Improvement in the condition is determined by conducting a vision test.

Vision testing involves a visual acuity test which is a standard test using the eye chart. This is then followed by the vision field scanner which is an instrument used by optometrists. This instrument is used to test degenerating vision field in Glaucoma and vision loss patients.

This scan is done by looking into a spherical apparatus which is white in color and dome shaped. Light flashes resembling white dots against a white opaque background is produced by the machine.

Everytime a light flash is produced, the patient has to push the button. The device maps the patient's vision field effectively.

Microacupuncture should be complemented with Chinese herbs and nutritional supplements like Ginko Biloba, fatty acids like borage, black current, fish oil, flax, etc.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine is actually the only hope for a lot of people who are suffering from degenerative eye conditions like glaucoma, retinitis pigmentosa, etc.

Cosmetic Acupuncture –

Cosmetic acupuncture is very popular in a lot of countries now. Cosmetic acupuncture practitioners and patients are very happy with procedures like tucking the nose, lifting the breasts, making the double chin single once again, etc.

According to the practitioners, cosmetic acupuncture is popular probably because of their use of non toxic techniques.

An average facelift using acupuncture costs about \$1200 for a treatment of ten sittings spanning over ten weeks. The last three sessions usually take more time and requires more number of needles to be inserted.

Acupuncture has been very effective in weight loss procedures too. Though a lot more research has to be done on how to use acupuncture effectively in cosmetology, it is obviously gaining popularity and importance being less painful and non toxic.

Synopsis –

Acupuncture is an effective treatment option for many conditions which are otherwise difficult to treat with conventional medicine. Acupuncture is also very effective when used in complement with conventional Western Medicine like for anaesthesia purposes.

Acupuncture being not very publicised is the reason why not many people insist on this procedure. Practitioners can take more effort to educate the public on the benefits of going in for acupuncture.

People have to be made aware of the fact that with acupuncture in selected conditions and ailments, natural healing can cure without the use of any drugs or even surgery.

Acupuncture in fact is one of the CAM therapies covered by insurance. It is however safe to check with your insurer before the start of the treatment. There are certain insurance plans which require pre authorization for acupuncture procedure.

Originating in China the Acupuncture procedure is gaining popularity throughout the world. People all over are realizing the advantages of this procedure and a lot of experts are conducting a lot of research into this subject and treatment mode to invent better and advanced techniques.

People at present are enjoying the acupuncture treatment with lesser pain and are able to return to their normal life in a short span of time as compared to other forms of medical treatment.

It is only a matter of time with all the awareness being propagated that acupuncture will be a commonplace treatment option or will be widely used as a procedure complementing the traditional Western Medicine.