

GETTING TO THE POINT



Story By Casey Clampett De Lima

Six years ago, a 76-year-old heart patient laid on an operating table in China with nothing for anesthesia other than six strategically placed needles and a small amount of intravenous medication. Sleeping lightly, his doctors were able to wake him up to talk during the surgery if necessary. Hours after the procedure, he sat up. The next day, he walked out of out the hospital on his own.

Modern medicine at its finest? Hardly.

The practice of inserting tiny needles at designated points throughout the body—also commonly known as acupuncture—is a centuries old Chinese tradition used for remedying a host of conditions ranging from chronic pain to stress. As evidenced, the ancient practice continues to play an active role in modern-day Eastern medicine.

Like many ancient Chinese medical practices, the art of acupuncture is deeply rooted in the Eastern philosophy surrounding the critical importance of maintaining balance throughout the body—from tangible components such as nutrients contained in the blood to less tangible influences such as the energy force regarded as chi. The needles gently inserted into the skin serve to encourage the flow of positive elements while intercepting negative ones, preventing disease and promoting health, energy and vitality.

Despite the growing body of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of acupuncture, Western medicine has yet to be fully convinced. Ranging in its regard of the practice from slightly weird to downright bogus, recent Western studies purport that acupuncture is nothing more than a 2,000-year-old psychological placebo effect, after a trial discovered that poking a person's back with toothpicks provided the same relief as traditional acupuncture.



Some Western researchers claim that the success of acupuncture may lie in the ability of needles to release endorphins, the pleasurable chemicals that assist in temporarily numbing pain. Others state that the benefits of acupuncture lie in the patient's mind—in other words, people believe they feel better only because they are told that they should after an acupuncture session. However, what the same theories fail to explain is why acupuncture patients are saying that their pain is decreasing in duration and intensity with regular treatment.

Either way, if acupuncture is helping people with chronic pain feel better and doesn't seem to have any negative side effects, maybe getting stuck with a bunch of needles to isn't so weird after all. ■

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