

# Acupuncture

By Suze Hargraves

Almost everyone has heard of acupuncture but few of us really know what it's all about. Even fewer of us have actually utilized this alternative healing method despite it's endorsement by major health organizations. Although it's a complicated topic, here are the basics of acupuncture and how it can benefit your health picture.

At the root of acupuncture is the concept of "qi" (pronounced "chi"). Qi is thought of as the vital energy that flows through the human body and the universe. You may have heard it referred to as "life force". According to theory, qi is influenced by the negative (yin) and positive (yang) energies of the body and the universe. When the yin and yang are balanced the qi flows freely and our bodies and minds function better.

Acupuncture, which has been around for centuries, is used to remove blockages to the free flow of qi throughout the body. Acupuncture Today gives this outline of the primary concept of qi and it's role in acupuncture; "Qi flows through the body via channels, or pathways, which are called meridians. There are a total of 20 meridians: 12 primary meridians, which correspond to specific organs, organ systems or functions, and eight secondary meridians."

If all of this sounds like hocus pocus to you, take into consideration that the World Health Organization has endorsed acupuncture as a viable complimentary treatment to many health conditions. In 1997 the National Institutes of Health released a statement endorsing the use of needle acupuncture treatment for postoperative and chemotherapy nausea and vomiting, nausea of pregnancy, and postoperative dental pain. They also acknowledged that acupuncture may be effective in the treatment of addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia (general muscle pain), low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and asthma. At the time, the NIH said that more research was needed to "validate what appears to be useful for millions of Americans that have used acupuncture in this country."

Finding an acupuncturist requires the same diligence you would apply to finding an appropriate primary care provider. Acupuncturists go through a licensing procedure which can be viewed online at The New Hampshire Board of Acupuncture Licensing (<http://www.nh.gov/acupuncture/>). As with any healthcare practitioner, the patient has the right to inspect credentials and inquire about education and areas of specialty.

If you would like to learn more about acupuncture visit <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/>. Be sure to let all your practitioners know about each other and about any medicines, vitamins or alternative treatments you are taking. Communication is the key to success.

Although alternatives to western medicine may seem odd to us, they are viable options in your healthcare picture.