

# The Basics of Acupuncture

by *Krista J. Essler*

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Acupuncture is an ancient healing art, founded in China over 5,000 years ago. It was noted that soldiers would be relieved of their ailments when pierced with arrows in particular spots. The size of the wound did not matter, only the depth and location. Over the next 1,800 years, similar information was gathered to form the basis of what is known today as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM includes Acupuncture and Herbology as well as nutritional and lifestyle counseling.

TCM sees human life as a balanced force within nature. As life becomes unbalanced, the process of disease follows. During a visit to a TCM practitioner or Acupuncturist, information is gathered about a person's state of being by five methods: looking, feeling, asking, hearing and smelling.

## **Method**      **Gathering information about...**

Looking	Overall appearance; texture and color of the skin and hair; behavior; the shape and coating of the tongue
Feeling	Depth and quality of the pulse; reaction to palpating (touching) the area of complaint or key diagnosis points.
Asking	The main complaint and the general medical history of the patient.
Hearing	The sound and quality of the voice, breath and cough.
Smelling	Both the patient's and practitioner's observations regarding the odor of breath, sweat, urine, etc.

Once information is gathered, there are two fundamental means of diagnosis. The simplest theory is of Yin and Yang. This concept is commonly illustrated by this symbol:

Yang, associated with  
Male  
Hot  
Acute Disease  
Insomnia  
Constipation



Yin, associated with  
Female  
Cold  
Chronic Disease  
Sleepiness  
Diarrhea

Yin and Yang are opposite and balanced yet never separate. The dark night is accompanied by the light of the moon and stars. The TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) practitioner evaluates the equilibrium of Yin and Yang and assesses how to achieve harmony.



The second prominent system of diagnosis is that of the five elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water. These five elements relate to each other\*\* as illustrated below:

	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Organs	Liver/GB*	Heart/SI	Spleen/St	Lung/LI	Kidney/UB
Emotion	Anger	Joy	Worry	Sadness	Fear
Season	Spring	Summer	Late summer	Autumn	Winter
Taste	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent	Salty
Sound	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning
Color	Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black

\* GB = Gall Bladder, SI = Small Intestine, St = Stomach, LI = Large Intestine, UB = Urinary Bladder  
 \*\* solid: over-acting; dotted: counter-acting; hollow: creating

The relation of the elements reveals the present state of health. For example: black or dark circles under the eyes occur at times of stress (causing lack of or poor sleep). Stress taxes the adrenal glands, which are seated on the kidney.

TCM gives credence to the energetics as well as the physical aspects of each organ. A diagnosis that may sound odd to our Western ears is 'Liver overacting on the Spleen'. This does not mean the physical organs attack each other. Rather poetically, anger, the emotion of the Liver/GB, is suppressed and causes worry, the emotion of the Spleen/St. This usually leads to overeating (Spleen and Stomach are part of the physical digestive system).

Once a diagnosis is formulated, the practitioner has the challenge of choosing from over 365 points as well as hundreds of herbal formulas to bring each individual into balance. The acupoints of the body are arranged on fourteen meridians or energy pathways. These meridians correspond to eleven physical organs: Liver, Gallbladder, Heart, Small Intestine, Pericardium (the heart's lining), Spleen, Stomach, Lung, Large Intestine, Kidney and Urinary Bladder; one fictitious organ: The San Jiao or Triple Warmer; and two conceptual channels (of Yang and Yin respectively): the Du and Ren.

Charted, these points appear to be only on the surface. Actually, each pathway of points starts just below the surface until the energetics reach its respective organ internally.

A treatment consists of eight to 15 different acu-points. Thin, sterile and disposable needles are gently inserted into the body. They are retained from ten to 45 minutes, depending upon the diagnosis. The needles, apart from the bio-energetic balancing, can physically stimulate circulation of the blood (bringing nutrients to an area), drainage of the lymph system (the body's clean-up and immune system), the release of both hormones (such as insulin and estrogen), and neurotransmitters (such as endorphins, the body's natural pain killers).

In addition to enhancing the effects of the Acupuncture treatment, many Herbal remedies, taken between treatments, help to strengthen the body by providing nutritional support.

TCM is commonly sought for the relief of symptoms associated with Colds & Flu; Asthma; Menstrual Irregularities and Menopausal Syndromes; Stress Reduction; Repetitive Stress Injuries such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome; Sports & Traumatic Injuries; the effects of Aging including Arthritis, Insomnia, Constipation, Memory & Sensory Loss, Wrinkles and Sagging Skin; Immune Suppression Disorders including Chronic Fatigue and Candida; and Smoking Cessation.

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