



## Acupuncture Is What?

It was a beautiful refreshing Sunday morning in the Texas hill country when, for some reason or another, I decided to visit a small nearby church. The service was very enjoyable and after a very passionate and moving sermon the meeting came to a close.

I made my way up to the front of the church to meet the pastor, shake his hand, and congratulate him on a job well-done. As I shook his hand and introduced myself, he asked me, "So, what do you do for a living?" I answered, "I'm an acupuncturist." His expression changed into a puzzled look and his head tipped to one side as he told me, "You know that's Satanic, right?"

Well, needless to say, I was unaware that I was involved in practicing Satanism. The purpose of telling you this story isn't to make fun of this pastor or small churches, but to illustrate the wide-spread ignorance and misinformation that exists about acupuncture.

## Is Acupuncture Voodoo?

Although types of voodoo magic involve needles, that is where the similarity with acupuncture begins *and* ends. The earliest acupuncture textbooks that still exist were written about 2500 years ago, at a time when Chinese culture was highly influenced by a philosophy known as Taoism. Taoist philosophy promoted a balanced lifestyle at peace and in harmony with nature.

This philosophy understandably colors much of the theory developed regarding acupuncture, and because these texts are still foundational to the understanding of acupuncture today, they continue to influence the way acupuncturists conceptualize health and the human body.

A roughly equivalent example in the west is the development of Newtonian physics by Sir Isaac Newton. Although Newton was a dedicated Christian, there is no need to be a Christian to learn and utilize Newtonian physics. In the same way, becoming a Taoist philosopher is not a prerequisite for practicing acupuncture.

## Does Acupuncture Regulate My Energy Field?

Many believe that acupuncture works through regulating the body's energy field. This misunderstanding has its roots in the mistranslation of the Chinese word "Qi." In acupuncture theory, Qi is an abstraction that either refers to the body's constituents that cannot be seen or to the body's activity and movement. It's a highly useful term that allows acupuncturists to describe what is happening to the body in a holistic manner, without getting bogged down in every mechanical detail.

When a needle is carefully placed in an acupuncture point on the human body, the body reacts with physiological, measurable changes. Even though how acupuncture works is not completely understood (perhaps it does manipulate some sort of energy field?) its activity is visible and measurable.

## Does Acupuncture Hurt?

When I talk to some people about acupuncture, they immediately visualize large, painful, hypodermic needles. Acupuncturists use sterile, single-use needles that are about as thin as a human hair. Treatments pass with minimal discomfort. In fact, acupuncture is much more comfortable than a deep tissue massage. Many patients after getting used to the feeling of acupuncture, return to receive acupuncture treatments just for the profound state of relaxation acupuncture can induce.

## Is Acupuncture Alternative Medicine?

As an acupuncturist I am not opposed to modern western medicine. If you trip, fall, and split your head open on a coffee table, an acupuncture clinic is not an alternative to the ER! On the other hand, if your upper back is throbbing due to a day of slaving away on a computer then you should go see your acupuncturist.

Each medicine is suited for meeting your health needs in different ways. Limiting yourself just hurts you the patient. It is common for acupuncture to be used successfully in conjunction with western medical therapies. For example, treating cancer with chemotherapy can cause diarrhea, nausea, and fatigue. Acupuncture can decrease these side-effects and increase quality of life. In this way acupuncture can be called, "complementary medicine." As an acupuncturist, I don't work against your doctor, I want to work with your doctor.

## Do I Have to Believe in Acupuncture for It to Work?

Although some people respond to acupuncture better than others, it is not correlated with how much one "believes in" acupuncture. A recent study at Duke University involving nearly 4,000 patients showed that acupuncture was more effective than drugs such as aspirin to relieve chronic headaches. Acupuncture is not a clever method to make you believe yourself to be better. That being said, a measure of belief is needed. You have to believe enough in acupuncture to make a few appointments and give it a try. That's all the belief that you need. Until you try it for yourself, acupuncture will remain a Far Eastern oddity and you'll never know if it may be able to help *you*.

## About the Author

*Kurt Hein is a Texas Licensed Acupuncturist who grew up in central Texas and recently opened his clinic New Braunfels Acupuncture in New Braunfels, TX. He enjoys going on mission trips, swimming in natural swimming holes, exercising so he can eat loads of BBQ, speaking Spanish and drinking green tea. You may reach Kurt Hein by calling 830.626.8880 or visiting his website at:*

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