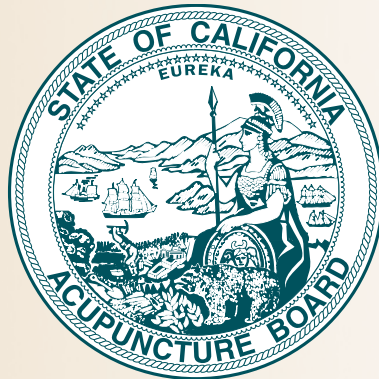




California Department of Consumer Affairs
ACUPUNCTURE BOARD

A Consumers Guide to

Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine





Additional copies of this publication are
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ACUPUNCTURE BOARD

444 North 3rd Street, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814-0226

For more information call 916/445-3021, or
visit the Acupuncture Board Web site:
www.acupuncture.ca.gov



California Department of Consumer Affairs
ACUPUNCTURE BOARD

A Consumers Guide to
**Acupuncture
and Oriental
Medicine**



Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor
State of California

Fred Aguiar, Secretary
State and Consumer Services Agency

Charlene Zettel, Director
Department of Consumer Affairs

A Consumers Guide to



Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

What Is Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine?

The theory and practice of acupuncture is based on Oriental medicine (also known as traditional Chinese medicine), a comprehensive natural health care system that has been used in Asian countries for thousands of years to preserve health and diagnose, treat and prevent illness.

Acupuncture treats health conditions by stimulating “acu-points” found at specific locations on the surface of the body. Acupuncturists stimulate the acu-points by inserting very thin needles through the skin to produce physiological effects. Other methods are also used to stimulate acu-points, such as heat or finger-pressure.

The general theory of acupuncture is that proper physiological function and health depend on the circulation of nutrients, substances and energy called Qi (pronounced “chee”) through a network of “channels” or “meridians.” This network connects every organ and part of the body, providing balance, regulation and coordination of physiological processes.

Pain and ill-health result when the flow of Qi through the body is disrupted or blocked by many things, including disease, pathogens, trauma/injuries and medica-

tion (side-effects), as well as lifestyle factors such as overwork, poor diet, emotions, lack of rest and stress.

Stimulation of the appropriate acu-points through acupuncture treatments helps to restore sufficient, continuous and even flow of Qi and other nutrients throughout the body, thereby restoring health and balance to the body, while relieving pain and other symptoms.

The acupuncturist uses a sophisticated and complex system of diagnostic methods that take into consideration the person as a whole, discerning the body's pattern of disharmony rather than isolated symptoms. The aim is not only to eliminate or alleviate symptoms, but more importantly to treat the underlying cause, increase the ability to function and improve the quality of life.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine is one of the newest primary health care professions in California. The potential benefits of acupuncture are widely recognized, and it is being increasingly integrated with mainstream health care. Since the 1970's, when acupuncture and Oriental medicine first became available in the United States, more than 15 million Americans have tried it. The risk of side effects is low and the potential benefits are high. Knowing what to expect from acupuncture will help patients get the most benefit from treatments. The purpose of this booklet is to help consumers approach acupuncture treatment from an informed perspective.

“The aim is not only to eliminate or alleviate symptoms... but to treat the underlying cause... and improve the quality of life”





Endorsement by the National Institutes of Health

In November 1997, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) convened a panel of 12 distinguished physicians and scientists to review the history, licensing, practice and current status of clinical research on the effectiveness of acupuncture. The first formal endorsement of acupuncture by the NIH stated: “There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture’s value to expand its use into conventional medicine and to encourage further studies of its physiology and clinical value.”

The panel determined there is clear evidence that needle acupuncture is effective for post-operative, chemotherapy and pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting, and for post-operative dental pain. Other conditions for which evidence is good but further substantiation is required include: post-operative pain, myofascial and lower back pain, addiction, stroke rehabilitation, carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoarthritis, headache, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, menstrual cramps and asthma. The panel noted the World Health Organization has identified more than 40 conditions for which acupuncture may be helpful. The panel found that one of the advantages of acupuncture is that the incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions. To read the NIH Consensus Statement, go to http://consensus.nih.gov/cons/107/107_intro.htm.

*“There is sufficient evidence of
acupuncture’s value to expand its use
into conventional medicine...”*

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Licensed Acupuncturists in California

The State of California has led the nation in the field of acupuncture, being the first to license qualified practitioners as primary health care professionals in 1979. To qualify for licensing in California, a student must attend a California Acupuncture Board-approved school to receive theoretical and clinical training and graduate with a master’s degree. Upon graduation, qualifying candidates must pass a comprehensive state licensing exam. A valid license issued by the Board must be posted in a conspicuous office location.

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What To Expect From Acupuncture Treatment

Being informed and understanding what to expect from acupuncture treatment from the beginning will make you feel more comfortable about the experience.

Determine Your Goals Are you looking for a primary health care practitioner or someone who will work with your current physician? Are you seeking short-term treatment for a specific complaint or do you want a prevention-oriented, holistic approach to the health of mind, body and spirit that acupuncture and Oriental medicine can provide? Do you have a work-related injury that is covered by Workers’ Compensation?

Select a Practitioner Ask friends, relatives, your doctor or your health plan for a referral to a reputable practitioner. You can access a list of professional associations or verify a license through the California Acupuncture Board’s Web site: www.acupuncture.ca.gov

“Being informed and understanding what to expect... will make you feel more comfortable about the experience”

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What To Expect From Acupuncture Treatment *continued*

Once you have some names, call the practitioners' offices and ask questions. Find out about their training, length of practice, which aspects of acupuncture and Oriental medicine they employ, any specializations and their experience in treating your ailment. You may also want to ask about the cost of treatment.

Diagnosis An acupuncturist's diagnosis is determined in part using methods similar to other health care practitioners: asking patients for a thorough history of their health, diet, exercise patterns and chief complaints; performing a physical exam, ordering laboratory tests, X-rays or MRIs; and making a referral to a specialist, as necessary. However, the acupuncturist also uses unique diagnostic techniques, such as taking the patient's pulse on both wrists and observing the tongue, complexion and other signs. The three pulses felt on each wrist are thought to correspond to certain organs and functions. The practitioner should explain the nature of your problem, the recommended treatment plan and an anticipated prognosis (outcome).

Treatment Procedures Modern acupuncture needles are stainless steel, between one-half and three inches long, ultra-fine and quite flexible. They are pre-sterilized, nontoxic and disposable (single use). When the needles are tapped into the skin, there may not be any sensation. Much depends on the location (hands and feet tend to be more sensitive), the condition being treated and the acupuncturist's technique. Needles are typically placed in several acu-points and are usually left in about 20-40 minutes. The goal is to normalize the circulation of Qi and blood by stimulating the energy point, which encourages the body's natural healing process. Stimulation can



be done by rotating the needles manually or attaching electrodes to send a weak electric current through the needles (electroacupuncture).

The number of treatments depends upon the duration, severity and nature of your health condition. Two or three treatments may be sufficient for an acute condition, while a series of 5 to 15 treatments may be needed to resolve chronic conditions. Some degenerative conditions may require ongoing treatments over a long period of time.

Techniques used may include: moxibustion (burning herbs to heat acupoints), cupping (suction), auricular therapy (ear acupuncture), tui na (manipulation) and acupressure.

Patients should evaluate their progress after each session. Some relief should be apparent in two or three sessions, or six to eight sessions for more pervasive conditions. If you see encouraging signs, stick with it. Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement. If your response to treatment is not satisfactory, the practitioner may consider further diagnostic exams, modify the treatment plan or refer to an appropriate practitioner, if necessary.

Treatment Precautions It is not recommended to have an acupuncture treatment if you are very hungry or extremely tired.

Some bruising may occasionally occur after needling. If you have a bleeding disorder or are on blood-thinning medications, you should inform your acupuncturist before undergoing treatment.

If you are pregnant or have a pacemaker, tell the acupuncturist so that appropriate herbs and acupoints will be chosen.

“If you see encouraging signs, stick with it. Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement”

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What To Expect From Acupuncture Treatment *continued*

“Most herb formulas can treat a wide variety of symptoms while stimulating the body’s natural healing process.”

Herbal Therapy In the course of your treatment Chinese herbal remedies may be prescribed. They may be dispensed as raw herbs or in pills, capsules, granules, or tinctures which make them easier to ingest. Most herb formulas can treat a wide variety of symptoms while stimulating the body’s natural healing process.

In California, acupuncturists are the only licensed health care professionals who are required to be trained and tested for competency in prescribing herbal medicine. California-approved acupuncture schools offer a minimum of 450 classroom hours of instruction in traditional Oriental herbology in addition to clinical training. Chinese herbal medicine has been practiced safely and effectively for centuries and has the greatest potential for beneficial results when prescribed by a trained professional who recognizes the benefits and risks.

In recent years, herbs have become very popular to self-treat many conditions. They are available in health food stores, supermarkets and on the Internet. While herbs are promoted as safe, inexpensive “natural” alternatives to pharmaceutical drugs, many health care professionals have concerns about safety, effectiveness and potential misuse of herbal products, especially when self-prescribed. There are also questions of purity, strength and standardization of herbs.

The California Acupuncture Board strongly recommends consulting an acupuncturist before beginning any herbal therapy. Also, it is very important to inform both your physician and acupuncturist of all the products you are currently taking (drugs, herbs, other

supplements) so they can monitor effectiveness, ensure safety from adverse reactions and watch for possible interactions. If you have an allergic reaction to any herbs, let your acupuncturist know.



Who Can Benefit?

Patients of acupuncturists range from infants to senior citizens. They may be seeking an alternative to Western medicine or it may be their last hope for relief, having exhausted other methods of treatment for a chronic condition. Or, an acupuncturist may be their first choice of health care practitioner for a low-risk form of treatment with few side effects.



What About Insurance Coverage?

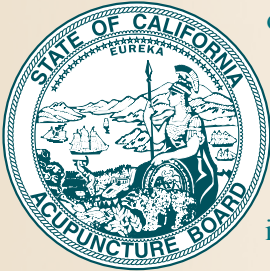
Most California insurance plans include acupuncture treatment in their policies. Ask your insurer about coverage or reimbursement. Some plans that don't normally cover acupuncture will pay for treatments if a physician recommends them. Many acupuncturists are providers for traditional PPO and HMO plans. Acupuncturists are covered under California State Medi-Cal and Workers' Compensation.

“Most California insurance plans include acupuncture treatment in their policies.”



California Acupuncture Board

The California Acupuncture Board issues licenses and regulates the profession according to the Acupuncture Licensure Act, which identifies acupuncture as a primary health care profession. The Board is an autonomous body under the Department of Consumer Affairs. The primary responsibility of the Acupuncture Board is to protect consumers from incompetent, unprofessional and fraudulent practitioners.



The Board establishes standards for the approval of schools, tutorial programs and continuing education; oversees the administration of the licensing examination; issues new and renewal licenses; and handles enforcement issues when complaints are received. The Board strives to promote safe practice through the improvement of educational training standards.

For complete information on the responsibilities of the Acupuncture Board, please see the Board's Web site: www.acupuncture.ca.gov

The mission of the California Acupuncture Board is to benefit and protect the public through appropriate regulation of licensure, education standards, and enforcement of the Acupuncture Licensure Act.

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How Are Complaints Filed?

A complaint should be filed by anyone who believes that a licensed acupuncturist has engaged in illegal or unethical activities related to their professional responsibilities. Anyone may file a complaint, and the Board will review each complaint received.

The most effective complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, many times it is impossible to pursue without documented evidence of the allegations made.

All complaints **MUST** be in writing and include the names, addresses and phone numbers of both the person making the complaint and the licensee. Please explain, in your own words, the nature and facts of your complaint. Include as much information as possible, including any documentary evidence available. You may use the consumer complaint form or file a complaint online at the Board's Web site, under Enforcement.

Complaints should be sent to:

ACUPUNCTURE BOARD
444 North 3rd Street, Suite 260
Sacramento, CA 95814-0226

*“The most effective complaints
are those that contain firsthand,
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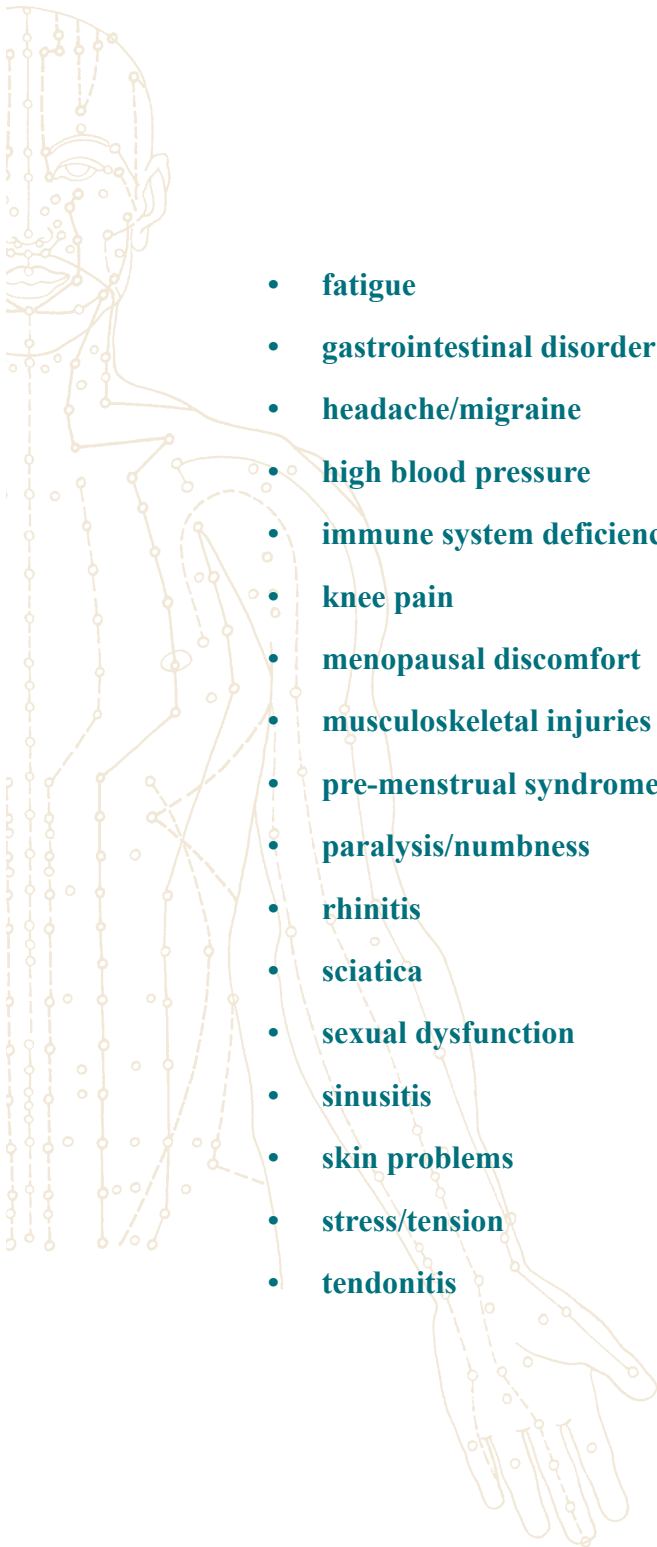
Conditions Treated

Treatment efficacy depends on the severity and nature of the condition being treated. Acupuncturists are trained to identify conditions that may require referral to a specialist, so it is important for you to provide detailed information about your condition so that important medical problems are not overlooked.

If you are under the simultaneous care of different health practitioners, it is important to keep all of them informed about your treatments to ensure there are no adverse interactions among treatments.

The following is a list of health conditions commonly treated by licensed acupuncturists.

- **allergies/asthma**
- **anxiety/depression**
- **arthritis/joint problems**
- **back and neck pain**
- **bladder/kidney problems**
- **childhood illnesses**
- **constipation/diarrhea**
- **colds/influenza**
- **cough/bronchitis**
- **dizziness**
- **drug/alcohol/smoking addiction**
- **effects of chemotherapy**



- **fatigue**
- **gastrointestinal disorders**
- **headache/migraine**
- **high blood pressure**
- **immune system deficiency**
- **knee pain**
- **menopausal discomfort**
- **musculoskeletal injuries**
- **pre-menstrual syndrome**
- **paralysis/numbness**
- **rhinitis**
- **sciatica**
- **sexual dysfunction**
- **sinusitis**
- **skin problems**
- **stress/tension**
- **tendonitis**



*“... it is important
to keep all your
providers informed
about your
treatments”*





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