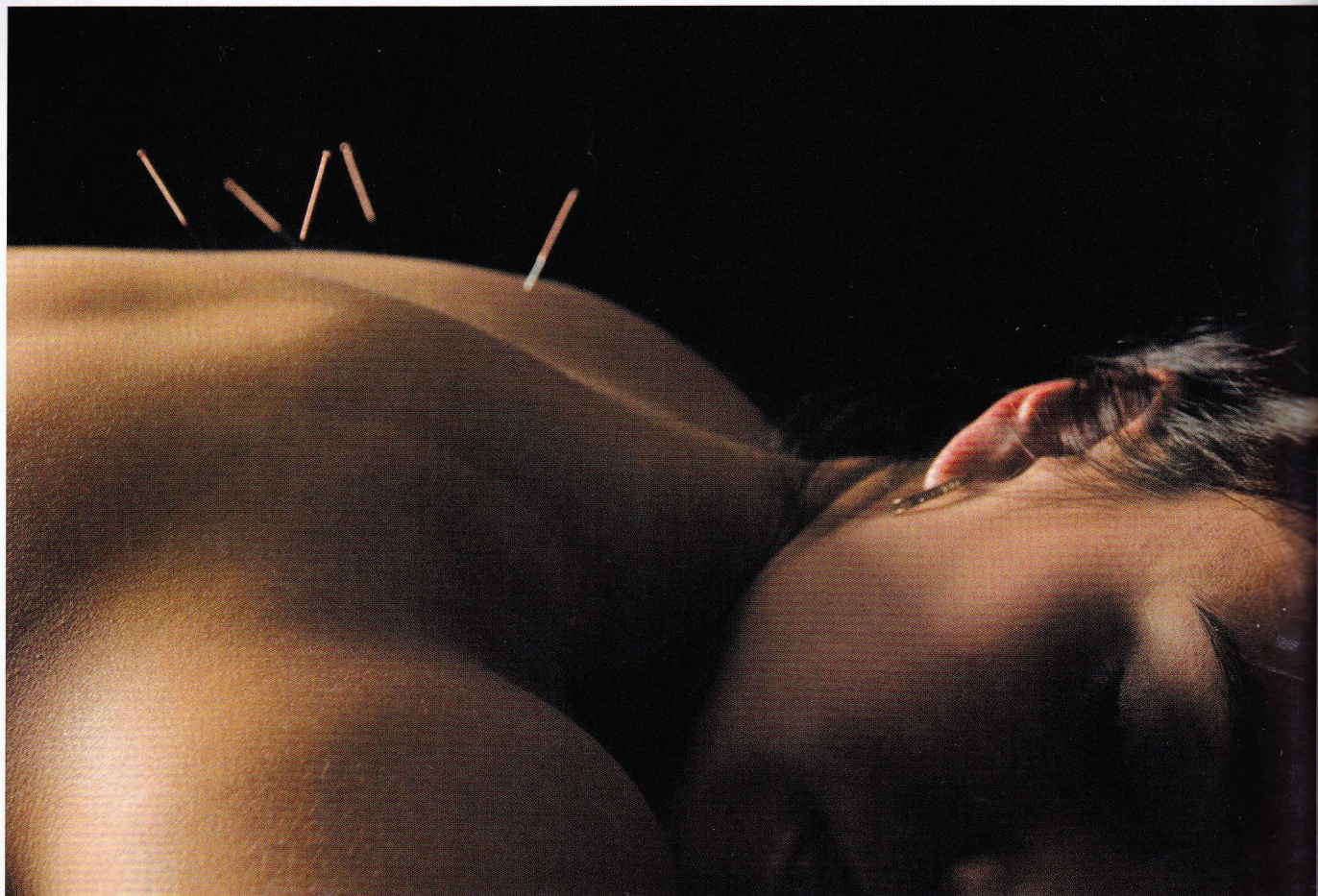


# balancing on a Pinprick

By Catherine S. Mitsen



Acupuncture may seem strange to those of us schooled in Western medicine's philosophy of pills, surgeries, and doctor's orders. Its practitioners, though, argue their ancient art gives the power of health back to the individual.

"Ultimately, I think the body is very intelligent," says Jamin Nichols, a certified Indialantic practitioner and professor at Dragon Rises College of Oriental Medicine in Gainesville. "I am not adding energy here, but I am trying to rebalance the energy in the [patient's] body, so that they are able to heal themselves."

When one first visits an acupuncturist, forget about trying to make it out in less than thirty minutes. The initial exam and history can take two hours. Oriental medicine is all about reading physical nuances—minimal changes in

the body's temperature, color, feel, and texture—that reveal ill health or *imbalance*.

Expect to confess dietary secrets, drinking and exercise habits, and work-life perspectives. Most practitioners then do a pulse diagnosis and a tongue evaluation. They touch your abdomen, feeling for areas of tension, and ask questions, lots of questions.

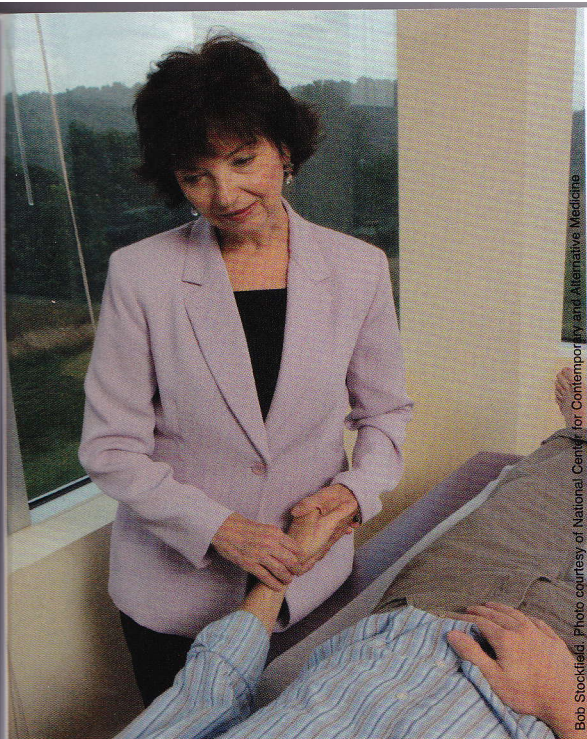
Your answers tell them what to do next. "If there is pain, I want to know if its sharp, came and went, whether it was more fixed or generalized—all these very much cause you to treat them in a different way," Nichols says.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health says acupuncture can relieve pain and improve function for people with osteoarthritis of the knee. As well, it shows promise in

improving pregnancy rates after in vitro fertilization. And the World Health Organization says it can be effective in relieving postoperative pain and nausea from pregnancy or chemotherapy, and can alleviate anxiety, panic disorders, and insomnia.

For chronic conditions, acupuncture is often one of the few, nonprescription-based treatments to show results. Helen Knight, a Tampa-based public relations professional, has suffered from migraines and headaches since her early teens. Acupuncture keeps her migraines at bay for the longest of any of the treatments she's tried. During her acupuncture sessions, the practitioner works on her back, putting the acupuncture needles in different points. "Normally it does not hurt, but every once in a while they will hit a point that's painful, congested," she says.





Bob Stockfield, Photo courtesy of National Center for Contemporary and Alternative Medicine

### A practitioner taking a pulse reading

At first, she feels nothing, often dozing off for the twenty-minute session. "I have light dreams and afterwards feel very, very relaxed, almost doopey for little while," she says. "It kind of feels like your system's being cleaned out."

Acupuncture and its adjunct Oriental therapies, all these practitioners urge, are best used early in one's ill health, before the body's formed a memory of the problem at a cellular level. Sharon Hodgson, a certified acupuncturist and owner of Acupuncture & Holistic Health Center in Tampa, says, "The longer you allow a symptom to reside in your body, the longer it takes to get rid of the problem."

It's like an unwelcome visitor, Hodgson says. Allow them to stay for two weeks and it's easy to ask them to leave; talk to them in six months, and they may not want to pack their bags.

"It [acupuncture] allows you to pick up on things before they manifest themselves on a physical level," says Nichols. He tells of a patient in for a regular treatment who had no idea they had a heart condition. During the pulse diagnosis, Nichols found an irregularity and urged his patient to see a physician. The medical doctor, he says, found a silent murmur that had not yet presented any outward symptoms.

Regular acupuncture treatments, Hodgson says, increases the movement of unfettered energy. Allowed to run free, this vital energy known as *Qi* (pronounced chee) stimulates blood flow, pumping nutrients and oxygen throughout the body, a process that regenerates cells and strengthens the overall immune system—two key components to avoiding disease and controlling one's health. **DR**






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