

## **Acupuncture for Pain Management**

Acupuncture involves the insertion of sterilized disposable needles at specific points along the body's energy pathways to regulate the flow of Qi. Acupuncture is one of the several therapies that make up Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) which has been used for over 5000 years and recent clinical studies have confirmed its many benefits. Clinical research has shown acupuncture to have many benefits which include pain relief, neurological, immunological and hormonal balance. In North America, acupuncture is best known for its effects in treating pain. It is becoming more popular as a natural alternative to reducing pain without the use of medication.

In Chinese medicine, the foundations to good health are balanced and properly flowing channels. The goal of acupuncture is to bring balance to the energy pathways and support the body to heal itself. Pain and disease are the result when these channels become blocked. By placing needles along the channels, healthy energy can be restored. In Western medicine, the view is that by placing acupuncture needles at specific points it releases the body's natural painkillers (endorphins), immune system cells, neurotransmitters and hormones to allow the body to heal.

In today's society, muscle tension and stiffness is a very common concern especially for those sitting for extended periods of time. Neck, shoulder and back pain are common problems generally caused by continuous mechanical strain which results in decreased circulation to these tissues and muscles. Long term tightness of the muscles in the neck and shoulder can affect the autonomic nervous system causing headaches, insomnia, lack of focus and concentration, poor memory etc.

### **Why use Acupuncture for treating pain instead of taking pain medication?**

It is widely known that taking pain medications such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) have harmful side effects to the body. Acupuncture, on the other hand, is a natural alternative to treating pain without the use of drugs.

When the body is injured, the body's cells release prostaglandins which are involved in causing inflammation and swelling. There are special nerve endings which sense pain and when prostaglandins are released, the nerve endings transmit the pain and injury messages to the brain. Medications for pain relief and anti-inflammation generally provide short term pain relief by blocking prostaglandins to be released. The less prostaglandins, the less pain because the brain is receiving less pain messages. However less pain messages to the brain does not mean you are recovered. Also by taking these pain medications, blood circulation in the muscles is reduced and inhibits proper recovery.

Acupuncture works to allow the body to heal itself without the harmful side effects of pain medications. It enhances blood circulation to the injured area as well as relaxes the muscles and tissues. With proper circulation, blood and nutrients can flow freely to the muscles to repair the tissues.