

# Introduction to Acupuncture Theory

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The saying "look to the old to discover the new" has inspired many current uses for acupuncture. Numerous ancient texts have given many hints for treating problems which previously had not responded to treatment. As one reads the ancient texts, it becomes apparent that at some great time in the past, the ancient Chinese had a most profound understanding of the laws of nature, the causes of disease, and the life force which animates living things.



Only recently have modern physicists come to understand the fact that invisible vibration and matter are not two separate items, but are actually at their fundamental level the same, that is . . . energy. This modern concept is mentioned matter of factly in the *Nei Ching*, a Chinese medical philosophy book written about five thousand years ago. Within the body there is an energy force the Chinese called *chi* (pronounced chee). The chi circulates to maintain the physical body; its function is to nourish and protect all the tissues.



The true practice of acupuncture is based on the idea of activating and balancing the chi which in turn brings about a change in the physical body. Acupuncture is a treatment form which works specifically on the chi energy.



The chi circulates within channels or pathways which are called meridians. There are 14 major meridians and another 57 secondary meridians in the complete network. Along the superficial course of the 14 major meridians are the acupuncture points which are like small dots. The acupuncture points, when stimulated by needle, heat, or pressure, affect a change in the chi and thus produce predictable physiological effects. Basically, acupuncture works via the meridians and their points.



Acupuncture can strengthen the chi or calm it. In the context of externally caused illnesses such as colds or flu, the old texts clearly state that in order for a disease to enter the body, the body must first be in a weakened state or at least weaker than the invading

force. Treatment can be applied as prevention to strengthen the body's resistance. If there is already a disease present, the treatment principle would be to raise the body's defensive energy and also to clear the congestion in the circulation caused by the illness.



In the context of a disease like arthritis, acupuncture is used locally at the joints, to reduce inflammation and increase circulation within. Treatment is also given at a systemic level to strengthen the body's natural anti-inflammatory response,



One of the most interesting aspects of the Chinese system is the scheme of correspondences between the major organ/meridians and seemingly unrelated tissues. For example, the kidneys are associated with the health of the bones and the lower back. A weakness of the kidneys often results in lower back pain and bone diseases. A basic principle is that any symptom is a reflection of an underlying imbalance or weakness of one or more of the major organs.



In addition to physical symptoms, specific psychological and emotional patterns are associated with the organ/meridians. Another precept acupuncture theory is that the mind and body are inseparable and one affects the other in all cases. For example, the predominance of one emotion like grief over a long period of time can result in a disease in its corresponding organ, in this case the lungs. This is called the body/mind relationship.



Besides the concepts of chi energy, the meridians, and body/mind, is the understanding that human beings are influenced, and reflect within their physiology the forces and patterns of nature and the seasons. The ancient Chinese doctors observed that the varying daylight hours and seasonal climates have a very distinct effect on the major organs and also that certain diseases are likely to be caused by excesses of climate.



There are two theories which are the basis of all these ideas; one is the Yin/Yang theory and the other is the Five Element theory. The Yin/Yang theory is used to understand and analyze body processes. Yin and Yang represent a theory of unified opposites: "One doesn't exist without the other and each is constantly changing into the opposite." This theory relates to the idea mentioned before about matter and energy. In the context of Yin/Yang, matter is yin and energy is Yang. Other Yin/Yang examples or respectively: cold and hot, weak and strong, female and male, night and day, hypofunction and hyperfunction, rest and activity, expansion and contraction.



The Five Elements represent five basic energies in Nature, which are symbolized by five substances: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. Each element corresponds to a specific organ, season, emotion, psychic activity, bodily tissue, and sound. For example, Wood represents respectively, the liver, spring, anger, planning, tendons and shouting.

This theory evolved from observation of the changing patterns in nature and is an elaboration of the Yin/Yang theory.



The Five Elements are like phases in a cycle of gradation from Yin to Yang. Fire is the most Yang and Water is the most Yin. Metal and Wood are at transition points between the two extremes and Earth is considered the middle. The primary idea of these phases is that they are all mutually dependent on each other. Each phase or element generates the proceeding one and also each is controlled or affects control over another. For example, Wood engenders Fire, is controlled by Metal and controls Earth. Translated to organ/meridian correspondences, it follows that the liver generates the heart, is controlled by the lungs, and controls the spleen/pancreas. Using the Five Elements makes it possible to understand the progress of a disease and its prognosis.



In summary, the main principle of treatment by acupuncture is the energy called *chi*. The chi circulates within the meridians and can be changed via stimulation of the acupuncture points. Each point produces predictable physiological effects. The two main theories of acupuncture are the Yin/Yang and the Five Elements. These theories are based on the shifting patterns of nature, which are reflected in the human physiology. Several important ideas expressed within these theories include the concept that environment, climate, diet and the emotions each have a specific effect on the body in health and disease; that the organs are all mutually dependent; and that any symptom is a superficial reflection of an underlying imbalance of the major organs.



The beauty of Chinese medicine is that it is basically naturalistic, holistic and unified. Its roots reach back to a highly evolved, non-technological culture and age. It offers in many cases an effective alternative to chemical drugs and surgery. It is also a helpful complement to Western medicine.