

East Meets West

By Richard Esquivel, L.Ac., MTCM

This is the seventh in a series of articles designed to educate the reader on Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Today's article is the third in a three-part series which will focus on what to expect from a typical treatment with a licensed acupuncturist. In the last issue, we discussed what to expect from a typical acupuncture treatment. Today we will discuss other therapies used by an acupuncturist in conjunction with acupuncture therapy.

What are other therapies used by an acupuncturist in conjunction with acupuncture?

Electrotherapy

A licensed acupuncturist may also incorporate electrical stimulation into the acupuncture treatment. This may consist of attaching low levels of microcurrent to the needles for enhanced therapeutic effect (percutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) or directly to the patient's skin (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation). There is also a special type of microcurrent that can be used to stimulate the central nervous system (cranial electrotherapy stimulation) which is approved by the FDA to treat insomnia, depression, anxiety and other stress-related disorders. These therapies are not painful and sometimes not even felt by the patient.

Moxibustion

Moxibustion involves lighting certain herbs to heat specific areas or acupuncture points which promotes warming in a localized area. It is used to treat the effects of cold attacking the body or to strengthen the body's immune or defensive system.

Cupping

Cupping involves using plastic or glass cups to create a vacuum effect which produces a vasodilatation reaction. Cupping is used to increase blood flow to painful, constricted areas of the musculature and underlying tissue.

Tai-Chi and Qi-Gong

Tai-Chi and Qi-Gong are therapeutic exercises incorporating bodily movement, mindfulness and correct breathing in order to strengthen or enhance the body's own ability to recover from illness or to maintain health and vitality. While they both involve gentle, flowing movements of the body which are done simultaneously with breathwork, Tai-Chi involves more bodily movement while Qi-Gong emphasizes proper breathing with simpler movement. These therapeutic exercises are excellent for all ages and simultaneously benefit many systems of the body, including the musculoskeletal, nervous and vascular systems.

Chinese Herbal Medicine

Chinese herbal therapy relies on the usage of individual herbal medicinals within complex formulations individually customized for each patient based on a

systematic theoretical medical model. Medicinal substances include plant substances such as roots, tubers, stalks, bark, flowers and leaves as well as some animal and mineral products. Herbal formulas may be composed of anywhere from 4-15 or more different substances and may be taken internally or applied externally to the body. The traditional form of ingestion of herbs is by drinking the decoction after boiling the herbs together and straining them. However, these days many practitioners including myself use herbal products which have already been cooked, dried, concentrated and tableted or encapsulated. This allows the patient the convenience of being able to take 3-4 tablets or capsules two to three times a day and still derive therapeutic benefit from the formula. If the herbal formula is well-written and the dosage accurately prescribed, there are usually no side-effects. Most herbal medicinals have very low toxicity, even compared to common over-the-counter Western medications. Nonetheless, I always recommend to consult with an acupuncturist prior to taking any Chinese herbal medicine, especially when taken simultaneously with Western medication.

Richard Esquivel is a Licensed Acupuncturist, trained in Traditional Chinese Medicine. He practices in Evergreen at Healing Touch Acupuncture Clinic, 2724 Aborn Rd. (at White Rd.), San Jose, CA 95121. ph: 408-528-7024, fax: 408-528-8557, email: richard@essentialhealthcare.com