



THE ALASKA CLUB

Needle Work?

Although acupuncture is at least two thousand years old, it's undergoing a glamorous makeover.

Acupuncture is enjoying newfound status as the alternative therapy du jour—even making a cameo appearance on *Desperate Housewives* as a treatment for anxiety and stress. Published reports suggest that a number of high-profile celebrities have successfully used the artful application of the needle to ease anxiety.

“Studies in China and Europe have shown that acupuncture can help patients with anxiety disorders and stress. Very few American studies have been done to validate acupuncture's effectiveness. Unfortunately, that's the case with most conditions,” says Julie Chang, a licensed acupuncturist at Chang Acupuncture & Associates in San Diego, California.

A recent study suggests that among test subjects suffering from anxiety-related insomnia there was a significant increase in the production of nocturnal melatonin as well as an

improvement in sleep habits after five weeks of acupuncture treatments. The findings appear to be consistent with other research, which suggests that acupuncture may help people relax.

Traditional Chinese medicine believes that emotions can exert a powerful effect on the body, sometimes leading to physical and psychological problems.

Although individual acupuncturists practice varying styles of treatment, acupuncture typically entails the insertion of hair-thin solid needles into various points on the body, including the ears, according to Chang, who has a Masters degree in traditional oriental medicine as well as a degree in microbiology and molecular genetics.

Chinese medical theory posits that energy runs through the body and along its surface in regular patterns called channels or meridians, which nourish and regulate differing



functions. Health flourishes when energy flows unrestricted. When energy is blocked or depleted, illness occurs. By needling acupuncture points, the flow of energy is normalized, helping to re-balance the body internally.

“A more scientific explanation is that the stimulation of certain trigger points on the affects the autonomic nervous system, vascular and endocrine physiology and brain chemistry as well as the body’s production of endorphins,” says Chang. She indicates that many patients report feeling more relaxed, with an improved sense of well being immediately after a treatment.

Acupuncture is frequently used in combination with other more conventional Western therapies—medicine, diet change, exercise, and cognitive behavioral therapy—to treat stress and anxiety. According to the World Health Organization, acupuncture demonstrates proven effectiveness reducing postoperative pain, nausea during pregnancy, nausea and vomiting resulting from chemotherapy and dental pain—all with few side effects. It can also relieve anxiety, panic disorders and insomnia.

Chronic fatigue, migraines, bedwetting, irritable bowel syndrome, depression and hypertension are among some of the other anxiety-related disorders that may benefit from acupuncture.

Treatments are adapted to suit the individual needs of patients and long-term effects vary. Acupuncturists take into account the nature, severity and history of patient complaints while evaluating their overall health.

“Usually one or two treatments per week are necessary to begin with. Anxiety is often a chronic problem thus requiring treatment for several weeks or longer, especially since circumstances such as stress from work and family often cannot be changed. Therefore, acupuncture is an effective tool to handle those stresses. As in any form of medical care, the patient’s attitude, diet, determination and lifestyle will affect the outcome and course of treatment,” says Chang.

The effects of acupuncture tend to be cumulative so while immediate post-session improvements may be transient, they last longer with more treatments.

Stuck on You:

Choosing the acupuncturist who’s right for you:

- In the U.S., many medical doctors regularly use acupuncture as part of their practice. Check with your doctor. If he’s not qualified himself, maybe he can recommend a reputable colleague.
- Look for a licensed acupuncturist. Each state has its own requirements—check for national licensing conferred by the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine.
- Make sure you feel comfortable and confident with your choice. It’s essential for effective treatment.
- For more information refer to Julie Chang’s website: www.sdhealthylife.com.

“Most people can benefit from acupuncture. Usually people who report no benefit are those who haven’t given it long enough to work,” says Chang. “There aren’t any specific types of people for whom acupuncture wouldn’t be effective.”