



California Department of Consumer Affairs  
**ACUPUNCTURE BOARD**

A Consumer's Guide to

# Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine



Additional copies of this publication are  
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Department of Consumer Affairs  
ACUPUNCTURE BOARD

1424 Howe Avenue, Suite 37  
Sacramento, CA 95825-3233

For more information call 916/263-2680, or  
visit the Acupuncture Board Web site:  
[www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov)



Gray Davis, Governor  
State of California

Aileen Adams, Secretary  
State and Consumer Services Agency

Kathleen Hamilton, Director  
Department of Consumer Affairs

2002

A Consumer's Guide to

# Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine



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## What Is Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine?

**A**cupuncture and Oriental medicine has been used as healing art for over 2,500 years. The general theory is based on the premise that there are patterns of energy flow called Qi (pronounced chee) throughout the body which are related to the organs and tendino-muscular system. When the energy flow is disrupted due to trauma, poor diet, medications, stress, or other conditions, pain or illness result. Acupuncture focuses on correcting these imbalances of energy flow by inserting ultra-thin needles under the skin to stimulate specific points in the body. Stimulation unblocks the channels and encourages an even flow of Qi, restoring the body's balance and relieving pain and other symptoms.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine is one of the newest primary health care professions in the United States. The benefits of acupuncture have become widely recognized and integrated with mainstream health care. Acupuncture's complex system of diagnostic methods take into consideration the person as a whole, not just isolated symptoms. Acupuncture practice is based upon discerning the body's "pattern of disharmony" and treating accordingly.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine treats and strengthens the physical condition, normalizes physi-

***“Acupuncture focuses on correcting these imbalances of energy flow...”***

ological functions, and controls pain. The aim is not just to eliminate or alleviate symptoms, but rather to treat the underlying cause, increase the ability to function, and improve the quality of life.

Since the 1970s when Acupuncture and Oriental medicine first became available in the United States, over 15 million Americans have tried it. Almost everyone knows someone who has had positive results. The risk is low and potential benefits are high. Knowing what to expect from acupuncture treatments can make a difference in the experience. The purpose of this brochure is to provide information to help consumers approach acupuncture treatment from an informed perspective.

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## Endorsement by the National Institutes of Health

***“There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture’s value to expand its use into conventional medicine...”***

In November 1997, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) convened a panel of 12 distinguished physicians and scientists to review the history, licensing, practice and current status of clinical research on the effectiveness of acupuncture. The result was the first formal endorsement of acupuncture by the NIH, stating “There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture’s value to expand its use into conventional medicine and to encourage further studies of its physiology and clinical value.” The panel urged health professionals to consider acupuncture, particularly integrating its use with conventional medicine after a thorough medical workup.

The panel determined that evidence for relief of post-operative pain and nausea associated with pregnancy or chemotherapy is clear-cut. Other conditions, including stroke, headache and chronic low back pain, were listed as benefiting from acupuncture. The panel also noted that acupuncture appears to be effective in relieving common disorders such as menstrual cramps, muscle pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, addic-

tion, and asthma. They also recognized that acupuncture treatment can result in a reduction in the amount of pain medication or anesthesia that might otherwise be required.

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## Licensed Acupuncturists in California

**T**he State of California has led the nation in the field of acupuncture, becoming the first to license qualified practitioners as primary health care professionals in 1978. To qualify for licensure in California, a student must attend a California Board-approved school to receive theoretical and practical training, and then graduate with a Master's level degree. Upon graduation, qualifying candidates must pass a comprehensive state licensing exam. A current valid license issued by the Board must be posted in a conspicuous location in their office.

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## What To Expect From Acupuncture Treatment

**B**eing informed and understanding what to expect from acupuncture treatment from the beginning will make your experience more comfortable and less apprehensive.

**Determine Your Goals** Are you looking for a Primary Health Care Professional, or someone to work with your current physician? Are you seeking short-term treatment for a specific complaint or do you want a prevention-oriented, holistic approach to the health of mind, body and spirit that Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine can provide? Do you have a work-related injury that is covered by Workers' Compensation?

**Selecting a Practitioner** Ask friends, relatives, your doctor or health plan for a referral to a reputable



practitioner. You can access a list of professional associations or verify a license through the California Acupuncture Board's Web site: [www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov).

Once you have some names, call the practitioner's office and ask questions. Find out about their training, length of practice, which aspects of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine they employ, any specializations and their experience in treating your ailment. You may also want to ask about the cost of treatment.

***“The practitioner should explain the nature of your problem and the recommended treatment.”***

**Diagnosis** An acupuncturist's diagnosis is determined in part using methods similar to other health care practitioners: asking patients for a thorough history of their health and chief complaints, performing a physical exam, and ordering laboratory tests, X-rays and MRIs if necessary. However, the acupuncturist also has unique diagnostic techniques, such as taking the patient's pulse on both wrists and observing the tongue, complexion and other signs. The three pulses felt on each wrist correspond to the major body organs and functions. The practitioner should explain the nature of your problem and the recommended treatment.

**Treatment** Modern acupuncture needles are from one to three inches long, ultra-fine and quite flexible stainless steel. They are pre-sterilized, non-toxic and disposable. When the needles are tapped into the skin, there may or may not be any sensation. Much depends on the location (hands and feet tend to be more sensitive), the condition being treated and the acupuncturist's technique. Ten to twenty needles are typically placed in several acupoints and are usually left in about 20-40 minutes. The goal is to normalize the circulation of Qi

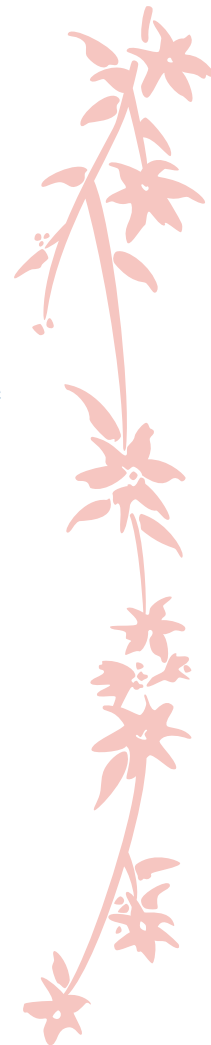
and blood by stimulating the energy point, which encourages the body's natural healing process. Stimulation can be done by rotating the needles manually or attaching electrodes to send a weak electric current through the needles.

The number of treatments depends upon the duration, severity and nature of your complaint. Two or three treatments may be sufficient for an acute condition, while a series of 5 to 15 treatments may be needed to resolve chronic conditions. Some degenerative conditions may require ongoing treatments over a long period of time.

The following techniques may be included with your treatment: moxibustion (burning herbs), cupping (suction), auricular therapy (ear acupuncture), tui na (manipulation) and acupressure.

Patients should evaluate their progress after each session. Some relief should be apparent in two or three sessions, or six to eight sessions for more pervasive conditions. If you see encouraging signs, stick with it. Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement. If your response to treatment is not satisfactory, the practitioner may consider further diagnostic exams, modify the treatment plan, or refer to an appropriate practitioner, if necessary.

**Herbal Therapy** In the course of your treatment, you may be prescribed herbal supplements. Chinese herbs consist of a variety of naturally found products that promote health. The herbs may be dispensed in pills, capsules, tinctures, or in raw form, which requires boiling as a tea. Most herb formulas consist of four to eight herbs and treat a wide variety of symptoms while stimulating the body's natural healing process.





In California licensed acupuncturists are the only licensed health care professionals who are required to be trained and tested for competency in the prescription of herbal medicine. California-approved acupuncture schools offer a minimum of 300 classroom hours of instruction in traditional Oriental herbology, in addition to clinical training.

In recent years, herbs have become very popular. They're available in health food stores, supermarkets, and on the Internet. While herbs are promoted as safe, gentle, inexpensive, "natural" alternatives to pharmaceutical drugs, many health care professionals have concerns about safety, effectiveness, and potential misuse of herbal products, especially when self-prescribed. There are also questions of purity, strength, and standardization of herbs, and considerations of side effects when taken in combination with other drugs. Chinese herbal medicine has been practiced safely and effectively for centuries and has the greatest potential for beneficial results when prescribed by a trained professional who recognizes the benefits and risks. Be sure to inform your acupuncturist if you notice any side effects from the herbs or any other treatment.



## Who Can Benefit?

Patients of acupuncture range from infants to senior citizens. They may be seeking an alternative to western medicine or it may be their last hope for relief, having exhausted all western methods for treating a chronic condition. Acupuncture offers a low risk form of treatment with few side effects, and is usually worth a try.



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## What About Insurance Coverage?

**M**ore and more insurance companies are including acupuncture treatment in their policies. Ask your insurer about coverage or reimbursement. Some plans that don't normally cover acupuncture will pay for treatments if a physician recommends them. Acupuncture is covered under California State MediCal and Workers' Compensation.

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## California Acupuncture Board

**T**he responsibilities of the California Acupuncture Board are to license and regulate the profession in accordance with the Acupuncture Licensure Act, which identifies acupuncture as a Primary Health Care profession. The Board is an autonomous body under the umbrella of the Department of Consumer Affairs. The primary responsibility of the Acupuncture Board is to protect consumers from incompetent, unprofessional, and fraudulent practitioners.

The Board establishes standards for the approval of schools, tutorial programs and continuing education; oversees the administration of the licensing examination; issues new and renewal licenses; and handles enforcement issues when complaints are received. The Board strives to promote safe practice through the improvement of educational training standards.

For complete information on the responsibilities of the Acupuncture Board, please see our Web site: [www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov)

***“...protect consumers from incompetent, unprofessional, and fraudulent practitioners.”***

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## How Are Complaints Filed?

A complaint should be filed by anyone who believes that a licensed acupuncturist has engaged in illegal or unethical activities that are related to their professional responsibilities. Anyone may file a complaint, and the Board will review each complaint received.

The most effective complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, they may be impossible to pursue unless they contain documented evidence of the allegations made.

All complaints **MUST** be in writing or on a consumer complaint form, with specific information needed to initiate a review such as the names, addresses and phone numbers of both the complainant and the licensee.

Please explain, in your own words, the nature and facts concerning your complaint. Include as much information as possible, including any documentary evidence available.

Complaints should be sent to:

**ACUPUNCTURE BOARD**  
**1424 Howe Ave., Suite 37**  
**Sacramento, CA 95825-3233**

You can get a complaint form by writing to the Acupuncture Board or by calling 916/263-2680, or the Department of Consumer Affairs hotline at 800/952-5210

***“The most effective complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information.”***

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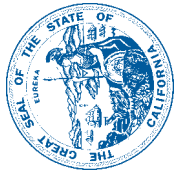
## Conditions Treated

**A**cupuncture works with the body, harmonizing and balancing energy. It improves circulation, releases endorphins to control pain, and allows the body to heal itself more quickly and more completely.

### Commonly treated conditions include:

allergies/asthma	heart problems/palpitations
anxiety/depression	high blood pressure
arthritis/joint problems	immune system deficiency
back pain	knee pain
bladder/kidney problems	menopausal discomfort
childhood illnesses	neck pain/stiffness
constipation/diarrhea	pre-menstrual syndrome
colds/influenza	paralysis/numbness
cough/bronchitis	rhinitis
dizziness	sciatica
drug/alcohol/smoking addiction	sexual dysfunction
effects of chemotherapy	sinusitis
fatigue	skin problems
gastrointestinal disorders	stress/tension
gynecological disorders	tendonitis
headache/migraine	





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