

Under pressure

Gentle yet deceptively powerful, acupressure delivers remarkable results, writes **Laura Greaves**.

John Kirkwood's introduction to acupressure almost 30 years ago was literally a bolt from the blue. "The practitioner put his hands on my shoulders, pressed some points, and a huge bolt of energy went through my body," says Kirkwood, now a Master Acupressure Practitioner at The Acupressure Centre (www.acupressure.com.au).

To the point

According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), qi, the life force, flows through the body via energy pathways called meridians. Physical and emotional 'dis-ease' occur when qi becomes blocked. Fortunately, the body also has 341 acupoints where qi can be stimulated and manipulated using pressure, needles, heat, and, most recently, laser.

"Acupressure releases energy at points where it is blocked - rather like breaking up an obstruction in a river to allow for better flow," Kirkwood explains. "There is no condition that can't be improved by acupressure, because all disease arises from blocked qi, from physical issues like digestive, sleep, and lung problems, to emotional ones like anxiety, anger, and grief."

There are several styles, including tuina, or Chinese massage, which uses vigorous circular motions; shiatsu, a Japanese form done on a mat which involves stretching and palm-pressing; the very vigorous Thai massage; and Jin Shin Jytsu, which uses gentle palming. Kirkwood's own method, Five Element Acupressure, is derived from the Jin Shin Do style. "It involves holding pairs of related points for two to three minutes each, in a static way,

"No difference is seen between your physical, emotional and spiritual levels— all health problems arise from something more fundamental, and all are interconnected."

until the energy moves," he explains. "In a one-hour session there might be 10 to 15 pairs of points used bilaterally - it is very relaxing."

The power of touch

Kirkwood says everyone can benefit from acupressure. "A practitioner adjusts their style to suit. For example, with cancer patients, no direct work would be done at the tumour site, in pregnancy some acupoints are avoided altogether, and children need only light pressure and short sessions because they respond so wholly and readily."

Acupressure has no real drawbacks, although clients may experience a treatment reaction. "Sometimes symptoms worsen before improving or other conditions appear, usually something they used to have in the past," Kirkwood says. "They are temporary, and actually indicate that things have shifted." Positive effects associated with acupressure include a greater sense of wellbeing, relaxation, and reduction of painful symptoms. "Regular treatment, even when you are well, promotes good health and prevents illness," Kirkwood says. "It's an investment in you."

"Acupressure helped in a scary situation"



Michelle Soo, executive coach and founder of Wellness for Leaders (www.wellnessforleaders.com), uses acupressure in her professional practice and personal life. "When I first received acupressure, I would quickly go into a very deep, trance-like state; sometimes I fell asleep. When I woke up, something just felt different within me. I remember my mentor saying that acupoints are sensitive. You have to be in a very Zen, meditative state when you give someone acupressure or you can affect them negatively."

"I like acupressure in this way because it acknowledges the innate healing potential within each of us. For example, late one night, a girlfriend stumbled in, quite freaked out. She said someone had drugged her drink and kept pushing her arms out, as if to get someone off her. Instinctively, I held the Yin Tang acupressure point on her forehead, and I was surprised at how quickly she settled. This point is right between the eyebrows and calms the mind and spirit. When I took my finger off it, she'd get agitated. Eventually, she fell asleep."

"I use the Yin Tang point often on myself when I'm stressed. It brings clarity to the mind and peace to the heart. It's important with acupressure to let your mind relax, open your senses, and let your body do the work. Then your conscious mind can receive the insights, fresh perspective and new energy."

Acupressure or acupuncture?

The obvious key difference with acupressure is the absence of needles. However, some people also find that acupressure is a more nurturing experience because it involves skin-to-skin contact with the practitioner. "While finger pressure cannot physically go into the body to contact the qi, the practitioner makes contact through intention," Kirkwood says. "An acupuncturist inserts needles and then stands back, while the acupressure practitioner is in constant contact with the client."



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