Help yourself Therapies

Under pressure

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

John Killewood’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 hole of energy went through my body,” says Killewood, 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 “ills” occur when qi becomes blocked. Fortunately, the body also has 800 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,” Killewood explains. “There is no rational that can be imposed 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 lomi, or Chinese massage, which uses vigorous circular motions, shiatsu, a Japanese form done on a mat which involves stretching and palming; the very vigorous Thai massage; and Jie Shii Jitsu, which uses gentle palming. Killewood’s own method, Five Element Acupressure, is derived from the Jie Shii Jitsu 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.”

The power of touch

Killewood says everyone can benefit from acupressure. “A practitioner adapts 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 swiftly and readily.”

“Acupressure has no real side effects, 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’,” Killewood 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.” Killewood says. “It’s an investment in you.”

Acupressure or acupuncture?

The obvious key difference with acupressure is the absence of needles. However, some people also find that acupuncture 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 tissue, the practitioner makes contact through intention,” Killewood says. “An acupuncturist inserts needles and then stands back, while the acupressure practitioner is constant contact with the client.”

“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 acupuncture, I was quickly going into a very stressful, toxic-like state sometimes I felt vacant. When I woke up, something just felt different within me. I remember my mentor saying that acupressure can sense 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, last night, a friend had stubbed her toe, and I helped her out. She said someone had dragged her drink and kept pushing her arms out, as if to get someone off her. Indicatively, I held the Yin Tang acupressure point on her forehead, and I was surprised at how quickly she settled. This pointught between the eyebrows and calms the mind and spirit. Whenever I took my finger off, she’d get agitated. Eventually, she fell asleep.”

“I use the Yin Tang pressure often 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.”

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