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Acupuncture

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Traditional Chinese (oriental) methods of acupuncture diagnose may include palpation of the abdomen, pulse and tongue diagnosis. Acupuncture is one of World's oldest systems of healing having a history of use in the health care system of China for at least 2,500 years. Acupuncture encompasses a variety of procedures involving stimulation of specific locations on the skin or directly under the skin using numerous techniques. The most common acupuncture technique uses thin needles, which are inserted manually to the acupuncture point. For patient safety acupuncture is performed with sterile disposable needles.

During a treatment session needles are placed into acupuncture points, which lie along energy pathways called meridians. Treatment may be associated with mild discomfort during needle placement, although, the procedure is usually relatively painless. The use of acupuncture by a physician generally should follow a thorough examination. Dietary, lifestyle, and exercise recommendations should accompany the acupuncture approach.

The general theory of acupuncture is based on the premise that there are patterns of energy flow (Qi) through the body that are essential for health. Disruptions of this flow are believed to be responsible for various disorders. Acupuncture is proposed to help correct imbalances of "energy flow" at identifiable points close to the skin. Needle acupuncture may cause an increased blood flow to the region of application or stimulation. Acupuncture may stimulate a local immune response and also contribute to the release of unique pain modifying chemicals within the central nervous system referred to as endorphins and enkephalins.

Acupuncture has been used by millions of American and performed by thousands of physicians, dentists, acupuncturists, and other practitioners for relief or prevention of pain and for a variety of health conditions. After reviewing the existing body of knowledge, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration removed acupuncture needles from the category of "experimental medical devices" and regulates them as it does other devices, such as surgical scalpels and hypodermic syringes. Over the years, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has funded a variety of research projects using acupuncture, including studies on the mechanisms of how acupuncture works. There is also a considerable body of international literature on the risks and benefits of acupuncture. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Cochrane Collaboration lists a variety of medical conditions that may benefit from the use of acupuncture.