Acupuncture

Acupuncture began in China some 3,000 years ago. It has been widely used in Europe since the early 1900s to relieve pain. A growing number of doctors find this method to be useful but cannot medically explain how it works. Patients are asking about acupuncture more often, especially when standard treatments have not made their pain go away.

The theory that, in part, acupuncture works through the release of brain neurotransmitters is gaining scientific support. Some evidence shows that acupuncture causes a release of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins are chemicals the body produces to feel good or to feel less pain.

PROCESS

To treat pain, caregivers choose exact points to place needles. Points are chosen from within the same *neural* (nerve) segment next to the area of pain. Points may also be chosen from the *extremities* (arms and legs) where many muscles are located. One of the most effective acupuncture points, Hoku, is located at the base of the thumb. The thumb has the largest number of connections to the brain.

TREATMENT

- Acupuncture needles are placed deeply into a muscle. This causes changes in the central nervous system that make pain go away. The relief from pain lasts a long time.
- Other forms of treatment such as *moxibustion* may be used at the acupuncture point. This is a form of heat therapy.
- A variety of massage and movement techniques may also be used to relieve pain.

National Headache Foundation (NHF)

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