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Acupressure: Long Definition

Acupressure is an ancient healing art that uses the fingers to press key points on the surface of the skin to stimulate the body's natural self-curative abilities. When these points are pressed, they release muscular tension and promote the circulation of blood and the body's life force to aid healing. Acupuncture and acupressure use the same points, but acupuncture employs needles, while acupressure uses the gentle but firm pressure of hands (and even feet). There is a massive amount of scientific data that demonstrates why and how acupuncture is effective. Acupressure, the older of the two traditions, continues to be the most effective method of relieving stress and tension-related ailments by using the power and sensitivity of the human hand.

Acupressure points are places on the skin that are especially sensitive to bioelectrical impulses in the body and conduct those impulses readily. Traditionally, Asian cultures conceived of the points as junctures of special pathways that carried the human energy that the Chinese call chi and the Japanese call Ki.

Stimulation these points with pressure, needles, or heat triggers the release of endorphins, which are the neurochemicals that relieve pain. As a result, pain is blocked and the flow of blood, life energy, and oxygen to the affected area is increased. This causes the muscles to relax and promotes healing.

Besides relieving pain, acupressure can help rebalance the body by dissolving tension and stresses that keep it from functioning smoothly and that inhibit the immune system. Acupressure enables the body to adapt to environmental changes and resist illness.

Several different kinds of acupressure are practiced, although the same ancient trigger points are used in all of them. Varying rhythms, pressures, and techniques create different styles of acupressure, just as different forms of music use the same notes but combine them in distinctive ways. Shiatsu, for instance, the most well known style of acupressure, can be quite vigorous, with firm pressure applied to each point for only three to five seconds. Another kind of acupressure gently holds each point for a minute or more. Pressing with an intermittent, fast beat is stimulation; a slower pressure creates a deeply relaxing effect on the body.

An acupressure therapist develops the ability to “read” the points and understand the energetic condition of the individual based on their sensitivity of these points. Pressure or pain at an acupressure point can reflect an imbalance along the meridian’s course and corresponding body areas. An acupressure assessment can include traditional pulse, tongue, and face reading as well as body observations, questioning, and the palpation of abdomen and back points.

As a point is pressed, the muscle tension yields to the finger pressure enabling the fibers to elongate and relax, blood to flow freely, and toxins to be released and eliminated. Increased circulation also brings more oxygen and other nutrients to affected areas. This increases the body’s resistance to illness and promotes a longer, healthier, more vital life. When the blood and bioelectrical energy circulate properly, we have a greater sense of harmony, health, and well being.