

## **A Consumer's Guide to Acupuncture and Asian Medicine**

The California Acupuncture Board's mission is to protect the people of California by upholding acupuncture and herbal medicine practice standards through the oversight and enforcement of the Acupuncture Licensure Act.

The Board can be contacted at:

Department of Consumer Affairs  
California Acupuncture Board  
[www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov)

1625 North Market Boulevard  
Suite N-219  
Sacramento, CA 95834

### **What is Acupuncture and Asian Medicine?**

The theory and practice of acupuncture is based on Asian medicine, a comprehensive natural health care system that has been used in Asian countries for thousands of years to preserve health and diagnose, treat, and prevent illness.

The general theory of acupuncture is that proper physiological function and health depend on the circulation of nutrients, substances, and energy called Qi (pronounced "chee") through a network of "channels" or "meridians." This network connects every organ and part of the body, providing balance, regulation, and coordination of physiological processes.

Acupuncture treats health conditions by stimulating "acu-points" found at specific locations on the surface of the body. Acupuncturists stimulate the acu-points by inserting very thin needles through the skin to produce physiological effects. Other methods are also used to stimulate acu-points, such as heat or finger pressure.

### **Licensed Acupuncturists in California**

Acupuncture and Asian medicine is one of the newest primary health care professions in California. The State of California began licensing acupuncturists in 1976, and in 1979 was the first state in the nation to recognize qualified practitioners as primary health care professionals. To qualify for licensing in California, individuals must meet specified educational requirements and pass a comprehensive State licensing examination. Once licensed, acupuncturists are required to renew their license every two years and complete continuing education as a condition of renewal. Licensed acupuncturists are required to post their license in a conspicuous location in their place of business.

## When Seeking Acupuncture Treatment

**Determine Your Goals** Are you looking for a primary health care practitioner, or someone to work with your current physician? Are you seeking short-term treatment for a specific complaint, or do you want the prevention-oriented, holistic approach? Knowing what your expectations are—and communicating them to your practitioner—will help you with your acupuncture experience.

**Select a Practitioner** The Acupuncture Board's role is consumer protection and does not provide recommendations or referrals. Ask your friends, relatives, doctor, or your health plan for a referral to a reputable practitioner. You can access a list of professional associations or verify a license through the California Acupuncture Board's website at [www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov).

Once you have a list of names, call the practitioners' offices and ask questions. Find out about their training, length of practice, which aspects of acupuncture and Asian medicine they employ, any specializations, and their experience in treating your ailment, as well as how much the treatment(s) will cost.

**Treatment Procedures** Modern acupuncture needles are stainless steel, and are between one-half and three inches long, ultra-fine, and quite flexible. They are pre-sterilized, non-toxic, and disposable (single-use). Much depends on the location (hands and feet tend to be more sensitive), the condition being treated, and the acupuncturist's technique. Needles are typically placed in several acu-points and are usually left in about 20 to 40 minutes. Stimulation can be done by rotating the needles manually or attaching electrodes to send a weak electric current through the needles (electroacupuncture).

Other techniques may include moxibustion (burning herbs to heat acu-points), cupping (suction), auricular therapy (ear acupuncture), *tui na* (Asian massage), and acupressure.

Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement. If your response to treatment is not satisfactory, the practitioner may consider further diagnostic exams, modify the treatment plan, or refer to an appropriate practitioner, if necessary.

**Herbal Therapy** Chinese herbal remedies may be prescribed in the course of your treatment. They may be dispensed as raw herbs or in pills, capsules, granules, or tinctures which make them easier to ingest. Herbal formulas may be prescribed to treat a wide variety of symptoms with the goal of stimulating the body's natural healing process.

Acupuncturists are licensed health care professionals in California who are required to be trained and tested for competency in prescribing herbal medicine.

Most herbs, with a few exceptions, are regulated as supplements, meaning the United States Food and Drug Administration does not evaluate their intended use or outcomes. In recent years, herbs have become very popular to self-treat many conditions. They are available in health food stores, supermarkets, and on the Internet. While herbs are promoted as safe, gentle, inexpensive, “natural” alternatives to pharmaceutical drugs, many health care professionals have concerns about safety, effectiveness, and potential misuse of herbal products, especially when self-prescribed. There are also questions of purity, strength, or the possible standardization of the application of herbs.

The California Acupuncture Board strongly recommends consulting an acupuncturist or your primary care provider before beginning any herbal therapy. It is also very important to inform both your physician and acupuncturist of all the products you are currently taking (drugs, herbs, and supplements) so they can monitor effectiveness, ensure safety from adverse reactions, and watch for possible problematic interactions. If you have an allergic reaction to any herbs, let your acupuncturist know.

## **California Acupuncture Board**

The California Acupuncture Board (Board) licenses and regulates the profession according to the Acupuncture Licensure Act, which identifies acupuncture as a primary health care profession. The Board is a semi-autonomous body within the Department of Consumer Affairs. The primary responsibility of the Board is to protect consumers from incompetent, unprofessional, and/or fraudulent practitioners.

The Board establishes curriculum standards for the approval of educational programs, oversees the development and administration of the licensing examination, issues new and renewal licenses, approves continuing education, and enforces the standards by investigating complaints when received. The Board strives to promote safe practice through maintaining of entry level educational practice standards.

For complete information on the responsibilities of the California Acupuncture Board, please visit the Board's Web site at [www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov).

## **How Are Complaints Filed?**

A complaint should be filed by anyone who believes that a licensed acupuncturist engaged in illegal or unethical activities related to their professional responsibilities, or for the unlicensed practice of acupuncture. Anyone may file a complaint, and the Board reviews each complaint received.

While anonymous complaints can be filed with the Board, it may not provide sufficient information to initiate an investigation. As such, the Board recommends that all complaints be in writing and include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of both the complainant and the individual they are submitting the complaint on. Please

explain, in your own words, the nature and facts of your complaint. Include as much information as possible, including any documentary evidence available.

The most effective complaints are those that contain first-hand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, they may be impossible to pursue without documented evidence of the allegations made.

You may file a complaint on the Board's website at [www.acupuncture.ca.gov](http://www.acupuncture.ca.gov) or send written complaints directly to the Board.

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