



Acupuncturist Diaries 3: “A Few Misconceptions About Acupuncture”

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One day, a middle-aged male patient said to me with a smile, “If I had known that getting a few slender needles put in my skin could alleviate so much pain, I would have gotten acupuncture much sooner. To be honest, I was a little freaked out about the needles in the beginning.”

This man had come into our office for his searing shoulder pain, which made it hard for him to even get a good night’s rest. His confession explained why he had been acting so anxiously during his first visit, asking if there were any alternatives to the needles, or if acupuncture could have any horrible side effects. When new patients are clearly afraid of acupuncture but are pretending not to be, I pretend not to notice their fear. However, I always make an effort to relieve their anxieties by explaining the needling process and thoroughly answering any questions they might have. Such introductions are especially necessary when patients are trying acupuncture for the very first time, or if they have had negative experiences with acupuncture in the past.

Let’s be honest, who would actually enjoy getting poked at with a needle? Many new patients say that they expect acupuncture to be as painful as stepping on a pushpin or getting blood drawn at a hospital. Even among Asian communities, where acupuncture has been a prevalent tool of healthcare since ancient times, patients naturally have anxieties regarding the pain and potential side effects of acupuncture. Let us then examine some of the biggest false claims that have contributed to the fear and misunderstanding of acupuncture among the general public.

1. Acupuncture is a painful process.

If you look at the tip of an acupuncture needle under a microscope, you will see that it is rounded. Unlike a pushpin or an IV needle, which break into the skin with a sharp point, acupuncture needles actually push into the *muscle* without “stabbing” into the skin. When receiving acupuncture, one may feel a bit of coldness, swelling, or heaviness in the area where the needle is placed. Because acupuncture is a process of unblocking qi (energy) from various parts of the body, such sensations actually work

to relieve pain by relaxing tensed, stagnant energy and promoting vital balance from within.

2. Acupuncture needs to be painful in order to be effective.

This myth was often touted by the Korean elderly, but unnecessarily painful needling is actually a clear sign of an unskilled practitioner. Even when treating sensitive areas such as the hands and feet, it is a basic skill of an acupuncturist to perform needling with minimal potential pain or discomfort for the patient.

3. Acupuncture can have extreme and adverse side effects.

There do exist certain spots on the body where acupuncture should not be performed, such as the sites of major nerves and organs. However, acupuncturists are diligently trained to avoid these spots, and side effects are exceptionally rare. Additionally, because acupuncture needles are extremely fine, it is physically impossible to cause a serious injury through acupuncture.

4. Acupuncture has a risk of infection.

In ancient times, acupuncture needles were recycled due to a lack of metal supply.

Today, each needle is sterile, single-use, and disposed of as biohazard waste. At Caring Hands Acupuncture, we have prioritized the cleanliness and proper sanitation of our treatment spaces since our opening in 2000. Infection is therefore an extremely rare, if not completely unrealistic, concern today.