

## Acupuncture & Related Techniques - Definitions

### ACUPUNCTURE

The term ‘acupuncture’ covers a diverse field that spans from ancient medical history to the most advanced contemporary neurophysiology. Practice ranges from simple techniques that can be taught to patients to more sophisticated invasive techniques that are the basis for much of the field of neuromodulation.

‘Acupuncture’ as a treatment usually involves the insertion of fine solid filiform needles into points in the somatic body, but it encompasses much more than simply needling: it involves a complex interaction and context that may include compassion, empathy, touch, intention, expectation and conditioning. This is almost certainly why clinical research consistently demonstrates large effects from ‘acupuncture’ as a package of care, and small (but statistically significant) effects of needling over sham techniques (that often involve needling as well). Simple techniques can be taught to most healthcare workers, and this can empower medical services in the remotest regions where more expensive medicines or even the simplest analgesics may not be accessible. By contrast, within the centre of modern healthcare, where there is access to the latest scanning technology, the use of the simple slim filiform needles can greatly enhance the assessment of pain by applying a mechanical stimulus in different tissue layers and recording the patient’s perception and recognition of symptoms.

### Medical Acupuncture

‘Medical acupuncture’ refers to the use of assessment and treatment techniques that have developed from the integration of a traditional East Asian therapy into contemporary Western (or orthodox) medical practice. Medical acupuncture requires a Western (or orthodox) medical assessment and an evidence-based approach to treatment. Therapies associated with medical acupuncture involve stimulation of the body to bring about therapeutic effects via endogenous mechanisms. They often, though not exclusively, involve the insertion of filiform needles, and may or may not involve targeting specific anatomical points.

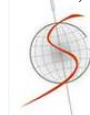
### Western Medical Acupuncture

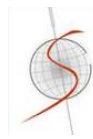
#### *‘Contemporary Acupuncture’ / ‘Scientific Acupuncture’*

‘Western medical acupuncture’ (WMA) is also referred to by the terms ‘Contemporary Acupuncture’ and ‘Scientific Acupuncture’, although all of these terms are open to interpretation. WMA has been defined as follows:

Western medical acupuncture is a therapeutic modality involving the insertion of fine needles; it is an adaptation of Chinese acupuncture using current knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathology, and the principles of evidence based medicine. While Western medical acupuncture has evolved from Chinese acupuncture, its practitioners no longer adhere to concepts such as Yin/Yang and circulation of qi, and regard acupuncture as part of conventional medicine rather than a complete “alternative medical system”. It acts mainly by stimulating the nervous system, and its known modes of action include local antidromic axon reflexes, segmental and extrasegmental neuromodulation, and other central nervous system effects. [extract from White A.

Western medical acupuncture: a definition. *Acupunct Med* 2009;27:33–5.]





## **Chinese Medicine**

Chinese medicine in its widest description covers all medical traditions, which have been developed, taught and practiced in China for over 2000 years, with roots to prehistoric times. Chinese medicine as it is taught and practiced today has a special tradition. Its basic concepts, systems, rules, methods and practices have been established more than two thousand years ago. It has been practiced, enlarged and developed over its long history until now, adapted to the corresponding different historical times. Chinese medicine includes specific and additional diagnostic methods such as tongue and pulse diagnosis and several therapeutic procedures such as herbal treatment, acupuncture/moxibustion, tuina, nutrition therapy and self-exercise such as qi gong and tai ji quan.

Chinese medicine is the root of other traditional East Asian medical systems each adapted to their own culture.

## **Classic Chinese Medicine**

Classic Chinese medicine is focused on the tradition and based on the theoretical and practical advice of the classic texts and textbooks, which have passed down or have been written by outstanding physicians over the centuries. The most famous standard textbook is 'Huang Di Nei Jing / The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic' (2nd century BC), which is still used as a main source of classic knowledge.

## **TCM Traditional Chinese Medicine**

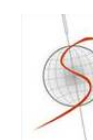
The term TCM Traditional Chinese Medicine was introduced in the beginning of the 20th century in China and has been substantiated during the foundation of the People's Republic of China under the leadership of Mao Zedong in the 1950's. Currently the term TCM is used in different ways, either for the officially agreed and accepted body of modernized Chinese medicine, or exclusively for Chinese herbal medicine.

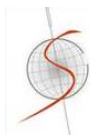
## **Traditional Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is a specific therapy and part of Chinese medicine, practiced along the whole history of Chinese Medicine. It is based on concepts and rules that apply also for other treatments of Chinese medicine. In a traditional perspective acupuncture is thought to regulate 'qi', the 'vital force' of the body. Internal and external pathogenic factors, such as wind, cold, damp or heat, may result in disturbance of qi, such as deficiency, excess, stagnation or blockage. Acupuncture regulates qi by using specific points on the body's surface with needles or application of heat. The indications of acupuncture are disturbance patterns according to the traditional physiology and pathology and are described in the terminology of Chinese Medicine.

The application of acupuncture is based on traditional diagnostic methods including inspection, interrogation, gathering of olfactory and auditory information and palpation. The most original methods are pulse and tongue diagnostic. The traditional diagnostic patterns are also the base for the treatment variations. Besides of using needles the application of pressure (so called acupressure or better pressure stimulation of acupuncture points), heat (moxibustion) and cupping is traditionally used.

Often acupuncture is applied in combination with other therapies of Chinese medicine.





### **Microsystems Acupuncture**

'Microsystems' within the field of acupuncture refer to complete therapeutic approaches that can be seen as subsets within the field. They are based on the theory that the entire body can be represented on an anatomically limited region such as the pinna of the ear, the scalp, the hands, the feet, and even the mouth and tongue. There may be diagnostic elements to the system, often through examination for tenderness, but they are mainly a way of defining points or areas to apply needling or related stimulation (usually acupressure) in order to have an influence on another area of the body. Whilst the somatotopic mapping of the body has yet to be supported by scientific evidence, the therapeutic value of the treatments has certainly shown value in certain clinical settings.

## **RELATED TECHNIQUES**

### **Neural Therapy**

Neural therapy is the diagnostic and therapeutic use of local anesthetics. There are multiple interrelations between neural therapy and acupuncture. Both of them are forms of regulatory therapy that influence the whole organism.

### **Laser Acupuncture**

Laser acupuncture is defined as the stimulation of traditional acupuncture points with low-intensity, non-thermal laser irradiation. The only relation to acupuncture is the use of these recognised sites on the body, since the stimulation parameters of the lasers used are below the level that excites nerve endings. The physiological effects of low level laser treatment (LLLT) may partly derive from blocking axonal activity in C-fibres; however, there may be other effects derived from absorption of photons of certain wavelengths. Laser acupuncture may be useful as an alternative to needle acupuncture in sensitive or needle phobic patients and in children.

### **Transcutaneous electrical acupuncture point stimulation (TEAS or TAES)**

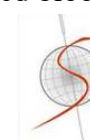
TEAS is a version of transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) that is directed at acupuncture points, and typically uses an alternating high and low frequency electrical current.

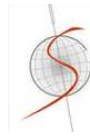
### **Acupressure & other related techniques**

**Acupressure** is a treatment that involves stimulation of traditional acupuncture points with pressure. The pressure may be applied by the fingers of a practitioner, or by the patient themselves. Manually applied pressure may be augmented with the use of a variety of devices. The simplest are seeds, often used on ear points, or beads, such as those used in the ubiquitous 'seabands', which are applied to the point PC6 just above the wrist.

**Tuina** is a form of manual therapy mainly involving massage that is part of Chinese Medicine.

**Gua Sha** is a physical treatment that involves unidirectional gentle scraping of the skin that results in petechial haemorrhages. Extensive superficial bruising is often produced using this method, and the observed therapeutic benefit of the technique may derive partly from products formed in the breakdown of the extravasated blood.





**Cupping** is a treatment that involves the application of suction to the skin and subcutaneous tissues in small areas with the use of cups. Cups come in a variety of shapes and materials, and the suction can be produced in different ways. The most recognised form is called ‘fire cupping’, where a flame is used to heat the air inside the cup just before application. Cooling of the residual air in the cup results in the development of significantly reduced pressure and so the skin at the application site is sucked inside the cup. The technique may be used alongside traditional acupuncture in a version known as wet cupping.

**Moxibustion** is a treatment that involves the application of heat to the body from burning the herb *Artemisia vulgaris*. The herb is formulated in a variety of ways, and can be attached to needles, or applied without needles.

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