

# point WELL TAKEN

Story | ANGELA AMBROSE



For thousands of years, acupuncture has been used to reduce pain and stimulate healing in the body. In modern-day treatments, very fine sterile, disposable needles are inserted into specific parts of the body called acupoints. Low electrical stimulation or heat can also be applied after the needle is inserted.

In traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture is believed to balance the energy pathways known as meridians, which flow throughout the body. An obstruction in a pathway upsets this balance and causes pain or illness.

From a scientific view, acupuncture stimulates nerves, which alters blood flow to the brain, and it releases endorphins and other natural chemicals that help the body heal, says Dr. Steve

Amoils, co-medical director of the Alliance Institute for Integrative Medicine in Cincinnati and co-author of “Get Well & Stay Well.” “It also gets rid of muscle spasm and sedates trigger points.”

In a 2003 World Health Organization report, a review of clinical studies showed acupuncture to be 55 to 85 percent effective in treating chronic pain, comparable to many pain-relieving drugs and far better than the power of suggestion, also known as the placebo effect.

“Where acupuncture shines is it treats multiple problems at the same time,” says Amoils. For example, in conventional medicine, if a patient comes in with tennis elbow, allergies and constipation, he might be sent to

three separate specialists. However, using acupuncture, Amoils says all three conditions could be treated simultaneously because they are treated through the same meridian.

In 2006, more than 3 million U.S. adults and 150,000 children received acupuncture treatments, according to a national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“The typical patient is a more educated female between the ages of 35 to 65,” says Amoils. “They usually have more disposable income, and they often have a symptom that has defied medical treatment.”

Acupuncture is most effective in treating functional problems such as chronic pain and fatigue, fibromyalgia, infertility and menopausal problems, he says. It is also commonly used

for digestive, respiratory and neurological disorders.

One of the biggest challenges is finding a qualified acupuncturist. Amoils suggests looking for a licensed acupuncturist or physician with specialized training at a reputable school.

“What we want to know is, how busy they are and what kind of results do they get,” he says. A thriving, growing practice is often one of the best indicators of patient satisfaction.

Acupuncture costs range from \$50 to \$150 per treatment, depending on the practitioner, number of needles used and duration of the treatment, says Amoils. Although acupuncture is gaining popularity, health-insurance companies do not usually cover the treatments. ♣



# run for your LIFE

Exercise has long been known to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other diseases. In fact, findings from a recent study of more than 1.3 million people suggest that the more you exercise and the harder you work out, the more likely you are to live longer than those who don't exercise. Individuals who participated in 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week reduced their risk of dying by 10 percent, and exercising at a more vigorous intensity reduced their risk by 22 percent.

The meta-analysis, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology*, showed individuals can cut their risk of dying even further by simply increasing their weekly exercise time and the intensity level of their workouts. When exercising 300 minutes per week, the chance of dying from any cause dropped by 19 percent for moderate exercisers and by 39 percent for those engaging in vigorous physical activities.



## snack ATTACK

Snacking in between meals can help tame your hunger, so you're not tempted to overeat at mealtimes. A recent study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that people who munched between meals were more likely to consume fruit, whole grains and milk than those who stuck to only eating three meals a day.

When selecting snacks, look for a combination of protein, fiber-dense carbohydrates and low-fat dairy. Consider replacing refined sugary foods with more protein-rich choices such as peanut butter, hummus, hard-boiled eggs or lean meats. Consuming a handful of nuts instead of cookies or potato chips will make you feel full longer and keep you more alert in those after-lunch meetings.

## under PRESSURE



When it comes to alternative healing treatments, reflexology is another widely-sought option, and uses thumb and finger pressure to stimulate "reflex" points in the feet, hands and outer ears. When pressure is applied, it is believed to stimulate nerve pathways that correspond to different organs, glands or parts of the body. According to the American Reflexology Certification Board (ARCB), the main goal of reflexology is to create relaxation and balance in the body. Although some practitioners claim that reflexology can be used to treat various health conditions, ARCB recommends using this therapy as a complement to medical treatment and not as a substitute for it.



## why HYDRATE?

During the warm summer months, your risk of dehydration rises with the mercury. Two recent studies from the University of Connecticut show that mild dehydration can negatively affect your mood, reduce your ability to concentrate and cause headaches and fatigue. Surprisingly, the effects of dehydration were the same regardless of whether the person was exercising hard or at rest. If you wait until you feel thirsty, you are likely to be 1 to 2 percent dehydrated, according to Lawrence Armstrong, an international expert on hydration and one of the lead researchers on the studies.

## gut REACTION



If you're looking to get a six-pack, abdominal exercises alone will leave you short of your goal. Working your core with crunches and other abdominal exercises may strengthen your muscles, but it does little to cut the fat around your midsection, according to a study published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*.

In the study, 24 sedentary men and women were divided into two groups: a nonexercise control group and a group that performed regular abdominal exercises for six weeks. When the study was completed, researchers found no significant difference in body weight, body-fat percentage or waist circumference between the two groups. However, the abdominal exercisers gained more muscle endurance and were able to perform more crunches than the control group.

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Angela Ambrose has been a writer for more than 20 years, working for Fortune 500 companies and the U.S. Public Health Service, as well as national magazines, newspapers and websites. She is also a nationally certified group fitness instructor and a registered yoga teacher.