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The Benefits of Acupressure

By Meagan Coy

As a massage therapist who practices Thai Massage, I have gained knowledge about acupressure through learning this bodywork modality. In Thai Massage, acupressure is used along what is called "Sen" lines, which are ten invisible energy lines that run throughout the body where a lot of major muscle attachments, nerve endings, internal organ correlation and blood circulation take place. These lines are very similar to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Meridian lines, where acupressure derives from. These lines tend to get "blockages" due to imbalances in the body such as organ dysfunction, muscle fatigue and build-up from negative, unprocessed emotions. Acupressure is used to work along these lines in order to restore balance to the entire body and help unblock anything that might be causing discomfort in your system. Since offering Thai Massage and applying acupressure work in my practice, it has been very well-received, so much so, that it has motivated me to incorporate it during my table massage sessions as well. But what is acupressure exactly? And why would you want to try it? That is what I hope to answer in the rest of this article.

When acupressure is applied to the body along those energetic lines that were mentioned earlier, finger pressure is used to mobilize chi, or "life force energy", at specific spots on the body called acupoints. There are hundreds of acupoints on the body, corresponding to other parts of the body (for example, there's a point on your hand for your kidney). These are physical points on the body and are the same points that are used in acupuncture, which is another healing modality derived from TCM that uses needles to help move the blocked chi in the body. Acupressure is often thought of as simply acupuncture without the needles, and both promote relaxation and wellness to help treat disease and bring unobstructed chi flow for optimal health. Acupressure can be applied by using fingers, palms, elbows or feet. Assisted stretching and special devices can also be used to apply pressure to acupoints on the body's meridians. In Thai Massage, the client is lying down on a mat on the floor and wearing comfortable loose clothing so that most, or all of these applications can be used in a session.

As with any form of massage, a huge perk of acupressure



is relaxation, one that's easy to get behind even if you doubt the existence of meridians. It is also often used for pain relief and stimulating the body's circulatory, lymphatic and hormonal systems. It also helps the function of the immune system and the body's natural ability to heal itself. Studies have also suggested it may help fight menstrual cramps, and headaches. Along with its ability to help treat a variety of ailments, receiver's experience additional benefits such as:

- Relieving stress, tension and anxiety
- Improving sleep
- Relaxing muscles and joints
- Soothing the pain and discomfort of a sports or other injury
- Reducing digestive issues
- Alleviating chronic pain

According to the Acupuncture Massage College in Miami, Florida, most people notice a marked improvement in their symptoms following acupressure treatment, but some can feel worse before they start to feel better. Some of these side effects have been noted as:

- Fatigue
- Soreness
- Bruising
- Muscle twitching
- Lightheadedness
- Emotional release

Although it's hard to give yourself a full acupressure treatment without the help of a skilled practitioner, there are a lot of acupoints that you can apply pressure to yourself that can alleviate symptoms. Some of these are:

- **ST 36:** Find the bony point right under your kneecap, then move slightly outside the knee to find a small divot. That's Stomach 36, and it's used for indigestion, nausea, constipation, etc.

- **LI 4:** If you've ever applied pressure to the high point between your pointer finger and thumb, you were massaging Large Intestine 4, aka the "great eliminator." It's one of the most popular acupressure points for headaches and migraines. It's also thought to induce labor during pregnancy.

- **GB 21:** Gallbladder 21 is a well-known point used to relieve neck and shoulder

tension from excess stress. It's located on the back side of either shoulder, between your neck and the point where your arm meets your shoulder.

- **Yin Tang:** If your yoga teacher has ever had you massage your "third eye" between your eyebrows, you were kneading the Yin Tang point. Mild pressure on the point is said to promote stress relief and relaxation.

- **PC 6:** Pericardium 6 is located on the inside of the wrist and is used for pregnancy-induced nausea or motion sickness. (It's the point that motion sickness bracelets press.)

The knowledge and use of acupressure has been around a long time in Eastern medicine and has been gaining popularity in the West over the last few decades. It is a modality that can help treat many ailments and has many benefits. If any of this information has resonated with you, I encourage you to give acupressure a try. Either through self-manipulation or finding a therapist who can apply it during a session for you.

"From high atop Rocky Road..."

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