

Back Pain

Did you know that your back could catch a cold? If you're outside working in cold weather, for instance shoveling snow, you might start to sweat. Keep the hat, scarf and extra layers on. They protect you from cold breezes that can get through the "wind gate" at your neck or upper back. Once wind gets through, a cold can settle into your back resulting in back pain.

Two other sources of back pain are trauma and a sedentary lifestyle. Trauma could be caused by a car or sports accident, which may have resulted in whiplash. A sedentary lifestyle, for instance sitting at a desk in the same position every day in repetitive motion, can overwork certain muscles. Have you ever pulled a muscle in your back while bending down? This could happen because of stretching in a different direction and then the muscle locks, thinking it's protecting itself but really it's just not used to moving that way.

When a patient comes into Lincoln Square Acupuncture complaining of back pain, they will be asked specifics about the pain. Where is it? What side? How long? Is it shooting pain, numbness or tingling? This would be nerve impingement. Is it dull or achy? This would be a muscle pull.

The first course of action would be to get the flow of the stagnated qi or blood moving again. The main points would be in and near the hands and feet. These points indicate gall bladder or bladder issues which may not make sense but for the fact that these are the longest channels. They run from the head, down the back and to the feet, zig zagging the body. Distal (extra) points will be included depending on the pain. These points are not on a channel but they affect channels and help in moving stagnation. Recommended treatment for severe pain would be three to five times a week, for moderate pain, twice a week and once a week for low pain. If the patient's progress plateaus, other treatments such as cupping or electro-stim will be used.

Another treatment that might be used is Ashi. Ashi is a combination of using needles on channel points, distal points and targeting local points. The practitioner will palpate (feel) points in the area of the back. When the patient feels pain, the practitioner will put points in those spots.

It might seem logical to only put the needles in local points, where the pain resides but that's counter intuitive. The objective of acupuncture is to get the qi to disperse. If only local points are used, the qi would be directed to those needles. The needles need to be placed in various areas in order to get the qi to move through the body. Local points are also difficult because the affected muscles are deep, thin and at an angle.

For a healthy back, there needs to be a balance of yin and yang. A yin deficiency is a sedentary lifestyle and a yang deficiency would be overworking muscles. Another factor is essence. There are two types of essence in the body. One is congenital, what you inherit from your family; you're born with it. The other is acquired, that you make on your own through your lifetime. For instance, too much sex will deplete your acquired essence leading to back pain. A healthy diet, plenty of sleep, Qigong and Tai Chi will strengthen your essence. The mantra of acupuncture is everything in moderation.