



What is Acupressure?

by Cheri Haines: B.S., Dipl.ABT(NCCAOM)®, LBT, AOBTA®-CI,
Jin Shin Do® :Bodymind Acupressurist & Senior Instructor

As a National Certified Acupressurist or ABT(Asian Bodywork Therapist) through the NCCAOM®(National Certification Commission for Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine), I am asked constantly, “What is Acupressure?” I generally tell people that it’s the same points & theories as acupuncture except that I stimulate the acupoints with my fingers & thumbs vs. inserting needles. In fact, when you search acupressure on Wikipedia it sends you to acupuncture. WebMD describes acupressure “as applying the same principles as acupuncture to aid relaxation and wellness and to treat disease. They go on to say, “Acupressure practitioners use their fingers, palms, elbows or feet, or special devices to apply pressure to acupoints on the body’s meridians. Sometimes, acupressure also involves stretching or acupressure massage as well as other methods. During an acupressure session, you lie fully clothed on a soft massage table. The practitioner gently presses on acupressure points on your body. A session typically lasts about one hour.” Yep, that’s what I do!

In the long history of Traditional Chinese medicine acupressure actually preceded acupuncture. Maybe a reason acupressure isn’t as well known is it’s humble history. Acupressure was used by everybody the everyday lay person, for self care & health prevention. I bet all of you have used acupressure on yourselves! Who of us hasn’t held a point on our heads when we had a headache or held points around our nose when we experience sinuses & allergies? Well, that’s acupressure. It’s simple, safe, instinctive & profound.



Tai Yang/ Headache Point



Great Cheekbone/ Sinus Point

I sometimes joke with my acupressure students that even my cats use acupressure. When I had 2 female cats that didn’t get along very well, my calm cat would put her paw on top my wild kitty’s head. My wild kitty would immediately become quiet & lay down. She was holding a point that’s well known & used for calming!



Courtyard of the Spirit
Calming Point



WebMD states: *"The goal of acupressure or other types of Asian bodywork is to restore health and balance to the body's channels of energy..... Some proponents claim acupressure not only treats the energy fields and body but also the mind, emotions, and spirit. Some even believe that therapists can transmit the vital energy (external qi) to another person. Not all Western practitioners believe that this is possible or even that these meridians exist. Instead, they attribute any results to other factors, such as reduced muscle tension, improved circulation, or stimulation of endorphins, which are natural pain relievers."* I say, even the "other factors"; like reduced muscle tension, improved circulation & increased endorphins causing less pain are still pretty good results to have!

The reasons I have found acupressure to be so beneficial to both myself & clients over my 23 years of practice is that it is both a form of Bodywork Therapy & also considered a therapeutic branch of Traditional Chinese Medicine. ABT is defined as a way to provide relief as well as improved health and well-being based on Chinese medical principles through the traditional bodywork therapies of Asia.

As a form of Bodywork Therapy, acupressure is excellent at promoting relaxation & reducing muscle tension. For myself, I find the the slower movements of acupressure to be particularly conducive toward deep relaxation and release of deeper muscular tensions.

Acupressure as a branch of Traditional Chinese Medicine makes it a therapeutic technique through its use of special acupoints, or acupressure points, that lie along meridians, or channels, in your body. These are the same energy meridians and acupoints as those targeted with acupuncture. Through these invisible channels flows vital energy or a life force called qi (chi). It is also believed that these 12 major meridians connect specific organs or networks of organs, organizing a system of communication throughout your body. According to theory, when one of these meridians is blocked or out of balance, illness can occur. Acupressure is among the types of TCM that are used to help restore balance. Of course, training here is important & is what distinguishes someone who has devoted their study to acupressure & ABT(Asian Bodywork Therapy) vs. someone who has taken a weekend acupressure course. It takes experience & training to learn about the energy channels/fields or meridians, assessment techniques & the means to move the energy to best improve the situation through acupoint combinations. And if nothing else, as WebMD says, acupressure can improve circulation & increase endorphins which reduces pain. There have been various research studies on acupressure showing improvement for nausea of various kinds, back pain, headaches, pain relief from minor trauma, insomnia, improved cardiovascular system, difficult breathing & agitation in dementia. The NIH(National Institute of Health) is currently studying the affect of acupressure on anxiety, fatigue & obesity. Suggested links to check for qualified practitioners: www.nccaom.org, www.aobta.org, www.jinshindo.org.

Inner Pass
Nausea Point



Acupressure is just one of a number of Asian bodywork therapies (ABT) with roots in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). There are various forms of ABT & acupressure as well as levels of experience & training. Some forms & practitioners may focus more on general balancing & muscle relaxation, some may focus more on therapeutic aspects, and others on both. Other examples of ABT would be Shiatsu, Amma, Jin Shin Do®:Bodymind Acupressure®, Jin Shin Jyutsu®, Thai massage, just to name a few. Have fun exploring it all!



Cheri Haines has been practicing in Madison, WI for over 23 years & teaching acupressure for 13 yrs. She received a B.S. in Child & Family Studies from UW-Madison and was Wisconsin's first Jin Shin Do® :Bodymind Acupressurist & Senior Instructor. She holds a Dipl. ABT(NCCAOM)® and AOBTA®-CI(Certified Instructor through American Organization of Bodywork Therapies of Asia). She is licensed through the state of WI as a LBT(Licensed Bodywork Therapist #3026-146). Cheri is available for individual sessions and teaches the entire Jin Shin Do® :Bodymind Acupressure® curriculum, as well as Self Acupressure classes. She is currently is on the faculty of TIBIA Massage School offering their unique Eastern Program of Jing AcuTouch classes. She can be reached at 608-335-4379, www.jinshindo1.com, jinshindo1@charter.net