

# **Pediatric Acupuncture / Acupuncture for Children**

## **Traditional Chinese Medicine for Children**

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Acupuncture is a wonderful medicine for children. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for children has been helping children feel better for thousands of years. It has a long and honored history in China, and it is growing in popularity in the West.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), of which Acupuncture is a part, has a history of continuous development for almost 3,000 years. During this time, principles of diagnosis and treatment of disease have been refined to a high degree of accuracy by the cumulative experience of centuries of Chinese doctors, and now through the research and experience in the West.

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**Pediatric TCM includes acupuncture, moxibustion, Chinese herbal medicine, and dietary therapy.**

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Acupuncture has the great advantage of being safe and non-invasive compared to surgery and other techniques. It is a safe and drug-free health care alternative for kids. It is free from the weakening side-effects of drugs. It is holistic and curative rather than merely symptomatic or palliative. The long-term effects are to strengthen the child.

Many diseases which orthodox Medicine cannot help respond very well to acupuncture, while for many other diseases, Acupuncture is an option worth serious consideration for its efficacy and safety. While acupuncture, which is performed by inserting special hair-thin needles into the skin at specific sites, doesn't reverse the pathology of disease, it has proven tremendously helpful in managing illness.

TCM works on very different principles from Western Medicine; Principles which may seem strange when viewed from a mechanistic standpoint. Yet TCM is the world's second largest medical system, serving well over 1.5 billion people worldwide. TCM is fully integrated as a medicine in its own right into the Public Health systems of present-day China & Japan, as well as in various parts of Europe and is certainly growing within the US & Canada. In addition, TCM is firmly recognized by the World Health Organization.

Labeling acupuncture as an "alternative therapy," is not providing justice to the TCM system. Most practitioners prefer the term "complementary therapy" since integrating the procedure with Western medicine can prove beneficial.

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**Traditional Chinese medicine explains the effectiveness of this 3,000-year-old therapy by its ability to restore the balance of "Qi" (pronounced "chee") as it flows through a complex system of meridians throughout the body.**

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### ***What treatment techniques are used to treat Children?***

Parents, if they have never experienced acupuncture, are sometimes weary of bringing in their child to get acupuncture because of its association with needles. Children usually do not have a problem with needles. Regardless of the fear or not, not all treatments need to use needles.

The first visit takes between 30 to 45 minutes. After establishing the general nature of your child's complaint, the practitioner spends some time closely observing the child, taking a pulse, listening to the heartbeat and lungs, and talking to the child (or parent/guardian in the case of infants) about what is going on. Even the youngest child responds well to this. Through looking, asking, listening, and touching, enough data can usually be gathered to make a good working diagnosis according to the principles of Pediatric TCM. From this, a treatment plan is developed and discussed with you and your child.

When working with children the actual time of the acupuncture is very brief. Children feel the effect immediately and may sometimes cry. Four to six acupuncture points are usually selected on younger children and on older children sometimes a few more. Everything happens within a short time, from a few seconds to a minute or so.

All acupuncture needles are approved by the FDA as medical tools; they are sterile, used once, and thrown away.

Under the age of seven years, the safest place for a baby or child is on the parent's lap. The child does not have to sit still (unlike adult acupuncture), as the needles are not kept in. Subsequent consultations, lasting between 15 and 30 minutes per child, start with a few questions and a brief reexamination to determine your child's progress, followed by the treatment for the day.

The number of treatments that will be necessary vary depending on the severity and duration of the condition, as well as the strength and constitution of your child. In considering your child's case, the practitioner works to shed light on the root causes of the condition. You and your child will then be advised to take appropriate measures.

Children seem to gain large benefits from preventative medicine and when it comes to their reaction to Oriental Medicine, it's no different. Chinese Medicine has been treating children for centuries, and as it turns out Pediatrics is one of the medicines best specialties (since the Song Dynasty - 960-1279).

Our children are so precious to us and watching them be sick is difficult as parents. Through the treatments of Acupuncture and TCM we can strengthen the child and decrease illness.

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### Common pediatric conditions for which Pediatric TCM is regarded as effective:

#### Respiratory

- Flu and colds
- Cough
- Pneumonia
- Asthma

#### Digestive disorders

- Stomach aches
- Constipation
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Teething
- Nutritional impairment

#### Sleep

- Insomnia
- Bedwetting
- Sleepwalking
- Lethargy

#### Constitution problems

- Hyperactivity
- Dyslexia
- Learning disabilities, including ADHD
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Failure to thrive

Strengthening the Digestive System to Treat Illness

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### ***What are some causes for disease/illness in children?***

There are several factors that can contribute to disease in any person and the same is true of children. In Oriental Medicine there are internal and external causes of disease. The external causes are linked to natural phenomenon that the Chinese observed to be true and the cause of illness. These external causes are wind, cold, dryness, heat, and dampness. When these factors are experienced in an excess amount then they may cause illness. They may also cause illness if the child has a weak constitution leaving them vulnerable to illness.

Another common cause of disease is emotional factors, also known as the *'seven affects'*. Emotions are usually not a cause for illness in children, as they do not hold back from expressing their emotions. If children do go through emotional problems at home this can lead to illness and some examples of illness arising out of emotional disturbances are asthma, insomnia, uro-genital disorders, and a number of mental illnesses.

The digestive system is the pivot upon which children depend on. Oriental medicine views the treatment of children to be extremely important, and when treating children the most important system to treat is usually the digestive system.

A classic Chinese saying that expressed this is "xiao er pi bu zu" meaning, "Children's Spleen is often insufficient". The focus of the digestive system in Oriental medicine consists of the Spleen and Stomach systems. According to Chinese medical theory, children's spleens and stomachs up to the age of approximately six are inherently immature (because they are still developing). That means they do not function as efficiently as a healthy adult's does. Until then the digestive systems are weak and overworked, so it is not uncommon to see children complaining of various digestive upset from diarrhea to indigestion.

In Chinese Medicine these complaints can be classified as an accumulation of food. Children's digestion is easily damaged by poor diets and an unnecessary use of antibiotics. When antibiotics are used they

kill the "bad" bacteria which are possibly causing the illness. Antibiotics simultaneously kill the "good" bacteria (flora) found in your intestines. This "good" flora is necessary for a strong digestive system and a healthy immune system. Persistent antibiotic use can lead to children have poor digestive systems or a recurring illness.

Parents might then ask, what is the best diet for my children? Young children should start with foods that are easy to digest foods, otherwise known as a '*clear and bland*' diet. As parents it is our responsibility to make sure we have control (as hard as that is in today's society) of our children's diets. Feeding children a proper balanced diet which consists of mainly cooked vegetables, grains, and fruit, and a minimal amount of raw fruits, fish, chicken, and meat is the best for their health. In the end, one of the key ways to treat all childhood illnesses is to work on the child's diet. If you can change a child's diet you can affect their overall health for their entire life.

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**Infants should be feed breast milk above all else, as it is the best food for infants. So why breast milk? Breast milk has the proper antibodies necessary to keep a baby's immune system strong and functioning optimally.**

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Even though breast milk is the optimal food for infants, a mother can still overfeed the infant with her breast milk. Parents should be careful not to overfeed as this could lead to an accumulation of food in the baby's stomach. For more information on the benefits of breast feeding read the FDA information at [http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/895\\_brstfeed.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/895_brstfeed.html).

When solid foods are introduced, one should start with easily digestible foods, like cooked carrots and well-cooked grains such as cream of rice. Because the process of digestion in Chinese medicine is likened to a process of cooking and distillation, foods which are cooked are, in general, more easily digested than uncooked foods. In other words, cooking is pre-digestion. Therefore, infants and very young children do better when they are fed mostly cooked, mashed, partially predigested foods than when they eat uncooked, chilled, or cold foods. Chilled and cold foods "douse" the fire of the spleen and (make it difficult to digest the food.) Likewise, drinking too many liquids and especially with meals "swamp" the spleen. In addition, foods that Chinese medicine labels as very "dampening" also easily harm the spleen when eaten excessively. These include sugars and sweets in general, dairy products (and especially chilled dairy products such as cheese and yogurt), peanut and other nut butters, and bread.

As I mentioned above, diet is large cause for illness in children. Some dietary problems that may cause illness are too little food, too much food, irregular feeding, unsuitable milk, early weaning, and food allergies. All of these factors contribute to illnesses, as the digestive system is inherently weak in children.

Another important therapy for children is herbal medicine. Herbal medicine has been used for centuries in China and in the treatment of Children. Antibiotics are not always necessary and with herbal medicine you can bypass the side effects experienced from taking medication. Herbal medicine is used for a short period of time when treating acute conditions and longer when treating chronic diseases.

## Resources

Acupuncture for Pain Management

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/acupuncture/acupuncture-for-pain.htm>

California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco, CA --

<http://www.cpmc.org/advanced/pediatrics/physicians/pedpage-504hosp.html>

Children's Hospital Boston –

<http://www.childrenshospital.org/views/feb03/acupuncture.html>

Treating Common Childhood Ailments with Acupuncture

<http://www.acufinder.com/Acupuncture+Information/Detail/Pediatric+Acupuncture+-+treating+common+childhood+ailments>

Pediatric Acupuncture: A Review of Clinical Research – In Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 12/09

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2781770/>

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