

Integrative Health Care: Acupuncture and Acupressure

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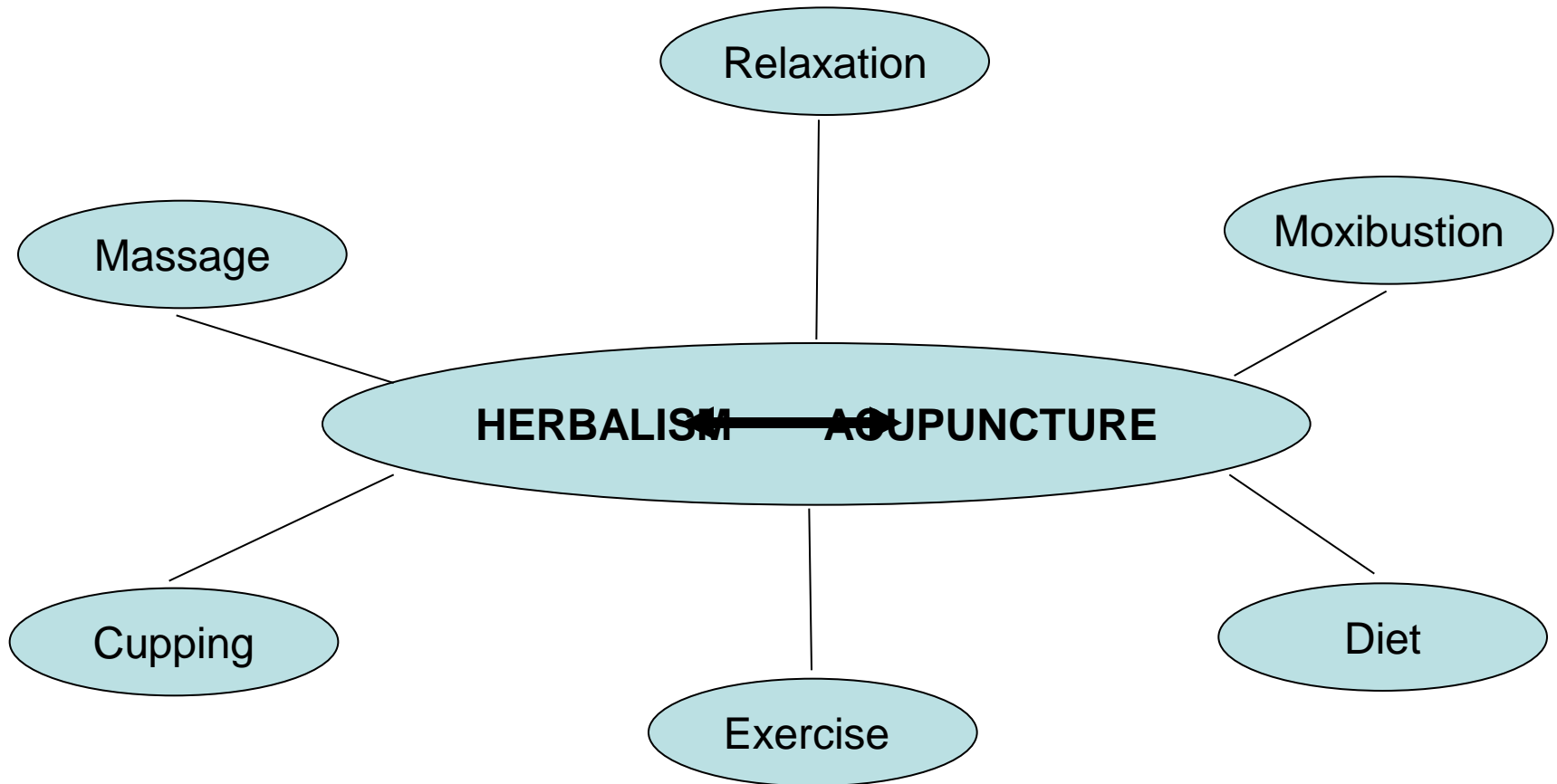
What is Acupuncture?

The insertion and manipulation of fine needles through the skin surface, to obtain some kind of therapeutic effect



- Originates in the East and has a history of several thousand years:
 - i) Part of the health care **system** known as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)
 - ii) Is also used independently of TCM as a **specific therapy**

Traditional Chinese Medicine



Informed by:

- ***Yin-Yang*** theory – opposite but complementary continuums
- the concept of ***qi*** – the universal ‘life force’
- ***meridian*** theory/acupoints

Yin-Yang Theory

Yin

Darkness

Femininity

Cold

Passivity

Density



Yang

Lightness

Masculinity

Heat

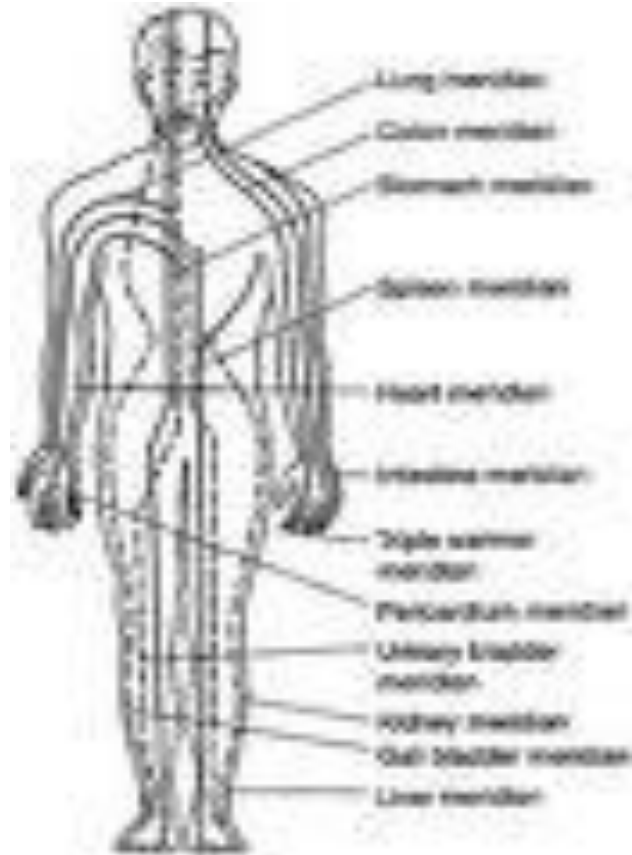
Activity

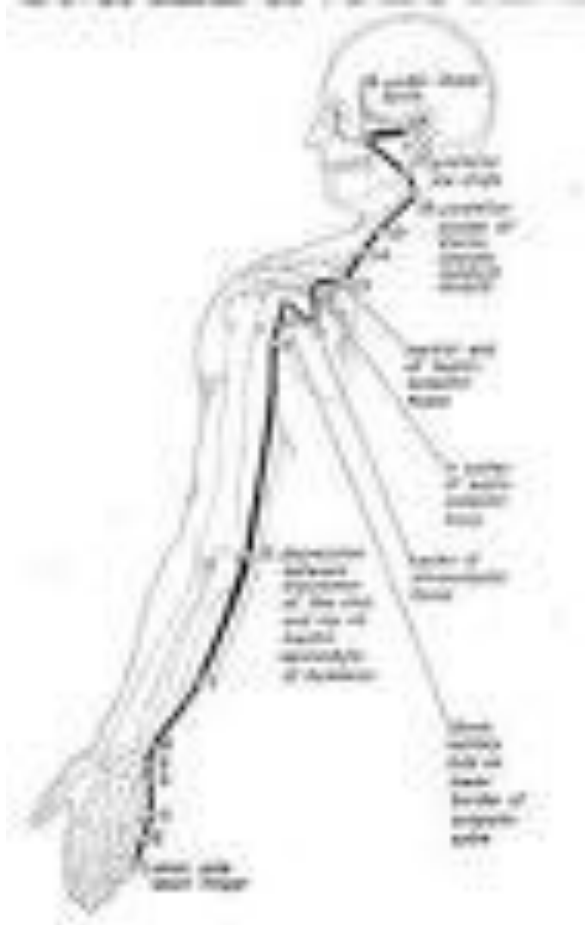
Space



Qi, meridians and acupoints:

- Qi is continually depleted and replenished
- Qi is stimulated at meridian ***acupoints*** either by needles (acupuncture) or pressure (acupressure)
- Aim is to restore balance to Yin and Yang energies







Variations on TA: Auricular Acupuncture



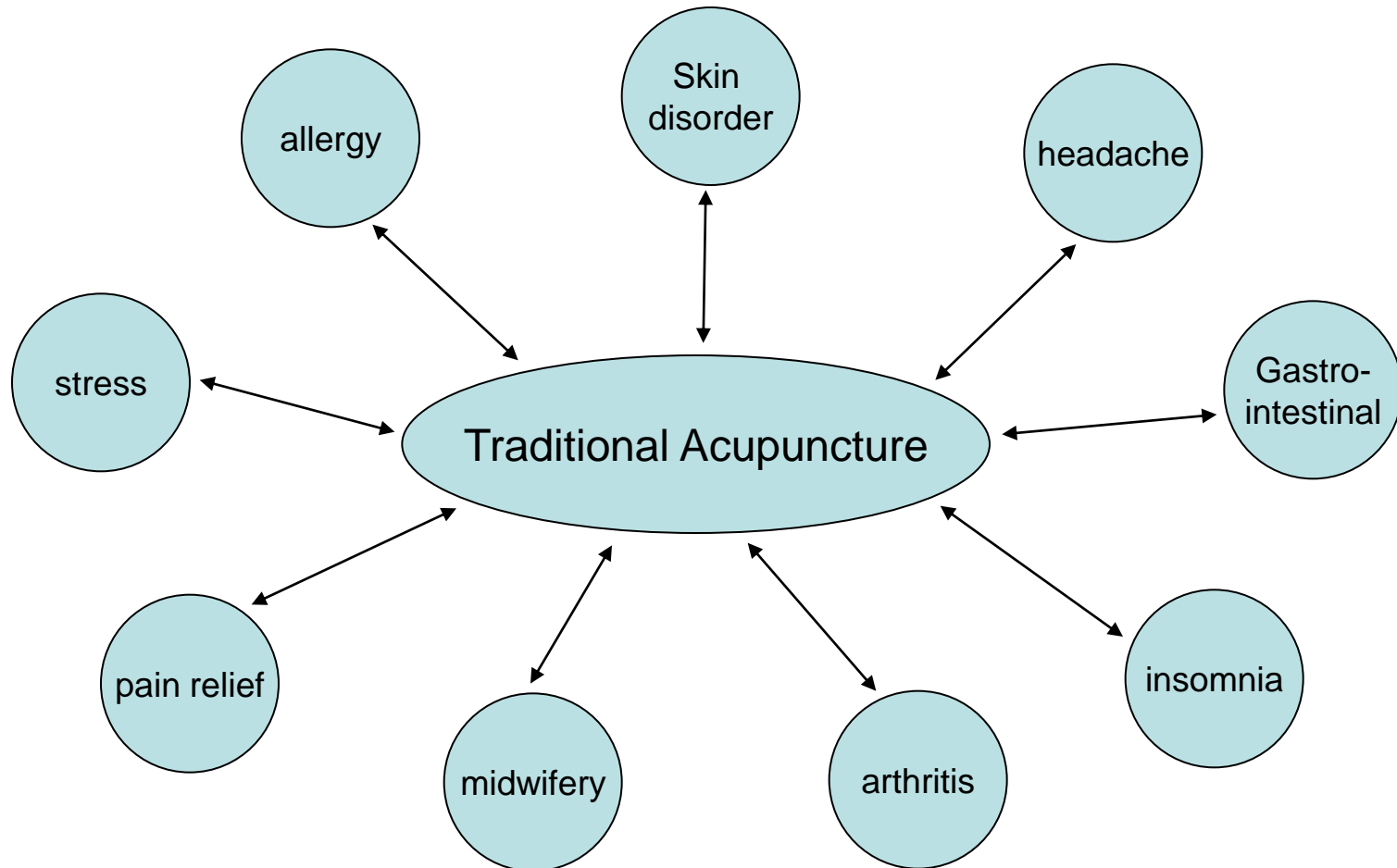
Variations on TA: Electro Acupuncture







TA: Uses



- Derived from traditional acupuncture but notions of yin-yang, qi and meridians are rejected
- Instead applies a more limited form of ‘trigger point’ acupuncture based on ***biomedical principles***
- Also uses electro and auricular acupuncture

Mechanisms of western acupuncture:

- CNS: nerve pathways, endogenous opiates, serotonin (Lin & Chen 2008)
- Anti-inflammatory pathways (Lin & Chen 2008)
- Local blood flow pathways (White et al. 2008)

Acupoints may have ‘neuro-anatomical significance:’

- Intramuscular (e.g. back pain)
- Nervous (e.g. trigeminal neuralgia)
- SNS (e.g. asthma)
- Systemic (e.g. nausea)

(Cheng 2009)

Tai Chi

- **TCM:** balances Yin and Yang in both mind and body through movement, breathing and concentration
- **The science:** physical and mental components of HRQoL improved for residents of nursing home following 26 week course of Tai Chi

(Lee et al. 2009)



Acupressure:

- **TCM:** gently balances energy/qi to relieve pain, stress etc. and/or promote well-being
- **The science:** 4 week course of acupressure (6 days/week) significantly reduced agitation in patients with dementia



(Lin et al. 2009)

GB-20, DU-20, He-7, P-6, Sp-6

Acupuncture:

- **TCM:** stimulates qi to restore 'energy' imbalance in both mind and body
- **The science:** traditional and deep-trigger acupuncture relieved lower back pain in older people attending orthopaedic OPD

(Itoh et al. 2004)



- **TCM:** drug abuse depletes Yin energies, especially in:
 - Heart → sweating, anxiety
 - Kidney → paranoia
 - Liver → euphoria, anger
 - Spleen → digestive
- Acupuncture strengthens Yin in these organs to relieve cravings and withdrawal symptoms (mostly ear acupuncture)



The science:

- Ear acupuncture stimulates the vagus nerve:
 - stimulates the hypothalamus/opioids
 - triggers 'reward' feelings
 - reduces cravings
- Few side-effects and cost-effective
- Evidence contradictory

Finally ...

- Many western practitioners still claim that acupuncture is 'all in the mind'
- But remember

Some patients ...
are less susceptible to auto-suggestion



“today’s fringe practice may become
tomorrow’s mainstream”

(GMC 1993)

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