

# Science:

by Suzanne Swearingen, DOM, AP

## Catching up to Acupuncture



Here in the United States, acupuncture and other Oriental medicine are commonly viewed as a last resort when allopathic, or conventional, medicine has failed. This is in part due to the lack of understanding of how/why acupuncture works. Interestingly, it is widely accepted that pills work, even though the average person does not know how they work. With the growing number of people who have experienced the benefits of acupuncture, scientists have begun implementing new technologies that are allowing us to determine how stimulating acupuncture points affects the body.

A Michigan University study used positron emission tomography (PET) scan to measure changes in the brain of people with fibromyalgia during acupuncture. The study showed that acupuncture increased binding potential at pain-reducing receptor sites. The reduction in pain levels expressed by the patients in the study correlated to the PET scan findings. Similar studies at Harvard Medical School have found comparable results using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). These studies showed changes in areas of the brain related to behavior, emotions, memory and maintenance of the persistent state of pain.

Another approach being used is the measurement of bioelectricity—what science refers to as a measurable force in the body. It is believed to play a significant role in cellular communication. Electrophysiology technology is being used to observe and measure changes in bioelectric conduction

within the body while stimulating acupuncture points. The University of Vermont General Clinical Research Center has conducted similar studies using ultrasound, which also noted changes in conductivity with acupuncture point stimulation. Thus far, the findings of these studies strongly suggest that meridians and acupuncture points play a role in improving flow of bioelectricity, thus increasing cellular communication.

An easier way to digest these concepts is to think of the body as an intricate system of roadways; there are major thoroughfares (blood vessels, nerves), and smaller side streets (capillaries, connective tissue). When blood, energy, body fluids and nerve pathways are allowed to flow uninhibited along these roadways, the body stays healthy. However, factors such as physical trauma, poor diet, and emotional upset present roadblocks and traffic jams. These create imbalances, resulting in some areas not receiving necessary signals or nutrients and others getting overwhelmed. Picture a faulty traffic light—one side of the intersection is congested with cars and the other side is empty. Chaos ensues when people can't get to their destination. Once the light is fixed, proper flow resumes. The needle is the tool that fixes the broken light. When placed in strategic points along channels that follow the roadways of the body, it restores the balance. There are skeptics who believe that there must be a placebo effect involved. The success rate with treating animals disproves this theory. In fact, animals in veterinary care with this therapy typically respond faster than humans.

One can obtain viable information on acupuncture from the National Institutes of Health, the World Health Organization, and the National Commission for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. These organizations offer data supporting the belief that acupuncture is a cost-effective and painless way to restore and maintain good health. Specific questions are best answered by a licensed, board-certified acupuncture physician. These professionals have spent many years studying this medicine and are happy to assist in educating the public.

*For more info, Suzanne Swearingen—licensed acupuncture physician, and board certified in acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine—can be reached at the Alternative Health Clinic in Myrtle Beach, 843-692-9243, and at South Strand Cardiology in Surfside, 843-293-2700. Visit [AlternativeHealthClinicMB.com](http://AlternativeHealthClinicMB.com), and see ad, page 33.*