

Acupressure

Yoga for Chronic Pain

What is acupressure?

- ancient healing art that uses the fingers to press key points on the surface of the skin
- method of sending a signal to the body to 'turn on' its own self-healing mechanisms
- assists body's natural movement towards homeostasis (stable, balanced internal environment)
- free, easy, safe, convenient way to relieve pain, alleviate symptoms & stay healthy

Contraindications

- Pregnancy
 - Avoid 'forbidden' points (see location notes)
 - SP-6, L.I.-4, GB-21, BL-60, BL-67, GB-21 and points on the lower abdomen and sacrum
 - These have historical use as points for difficult or painful labour and may promote labor
- Areas with lots of lymph nodes - groin, throat, outer breast near armpits
 - Avoid area
- Burns, cuts, infections, tumors
 - Avoid direct pressure over affected area
- Scars and injuries
 - Do not work directly on recently formed scars
 - During 1st month after injury/operation, don't apply pressure directly on affected site
- Rheumatoid arthritis, spinal injury, osteoporosis
 - Avoid direct pressure over affected area
- Varicose veins
 - Avoid direct pressure over affected area

How do you do it?

- Apply deep, firm pressure with a finger, thumb, knuckle or the eraser end of a pencil
 - Start by circling general area & move to static pressure on most 'interesting' place
 - Apply in a slow, rhythmic manner to enable layers of tissue to respond
 - Don't press in an abrupt, forceful, or jarring way
- While applying, relax & breathe mindfully
 - For relaxation/pain: deep inbreath, long outbreath - activates parasympathetic nervous system
 - For energy: kapalabhati (skull shining breath) - activates sympathetic nervous system
- Apply for 1-3 minutes at a time
 - On alternate sides
- Start gently/for less time/less frequently
 - Work up to firmer pressure, longer duration, more often
 - Listen to feedback from body
- After an acupressure session: relax for a while, move gently, stay warm, drink some water

How does acupressure work for pain?

Chinese medical view

- “If there is free flow, there is no pain. If there is no free flow, there is pain.”
- As long as qi & Blood flow freely through channels, there is no pain in the body
- If flow obstructed (or doesn't flow freely for some other reason) then there will be pain
- Pain is the felt experience of lack of free flow of qi and Blood
- Two main causes of lack of free flow of qi and Blood. Either;
- 1) Something blocking flow of qi & Blood through channels (plug of hair in drainpipe - water can't flow freely because something is physically obstructing pipe)
- 2) Insufficient qi & Blood to maintain free flow. Not enough qi to push Blood or not enough Blood to fill vessels (garden hose has only a trickle of water flowing through it)
- All pain, no matter what its modern Western medical diagnosis, is considered by Chinese medicine to be a problem with free flow of qi and Blood
- Acupressure treatment aims to restore free flow & thus relieve pain.
- Using acupressure at a combination of local points (near the site of pain) and distal points that have the general action of moving qi & Blood (4 gates' combination - L.I.-4 and LIV-3).

How does acupressure work for pain?

Western view

- Chinese channel pathways tend to correspond with
 - major nerve or blood vessel routes
 - folds in the body's connective tissue (fascial planes)
 - between muscles, or between muscle and bone or tendon.
- acupoints located along channel pathways are different from surrounding tissues
 - more nerve endings,
 - different electrical properties
 - different arrangements of connective tissue fibers
- Stimulation of acupoints results in a variety of physiological changes that affect pain

Biological mechanisms of acupressure

Circulatory

- Promotes blood flow to affected area (increases local microcirculation)
- This promotes healing:
 - Takes away metabolic waste products
 - Brings in
 - oxygen
 - nutrients
 - biochemical messenger molecules (such cytokines and hormones)
 - immune system cells

Biological mechanisms of acupressure

Neurological

- Inhibits pain signals by causing mild, fairly painless sensation
 - prevents painful sensations from passing through spinal cord to brain
- Gate control theory of pain
 - pressure on tissue at acupoint stimulates nerve endings
 - send non-painful mechanical sensation up to brain along fast conducting A-beta nerve fibers (which sense touch)
 - information reaches inhibitory interneurons (in spinal cord), it
 - shuts nerve transmission 'gate'
 - blocks conduction of pain impulses along slower conducting A-delta fibres (which sense sharp, burning pain) and C fibers (which transmit dull, throbbing pain)
 - acupressure sensation moves four times faster than pain sensation

Biological mechanisms of acupressure

Biochemical

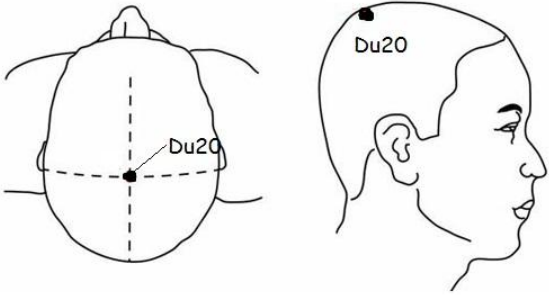
- Analgesic: releases natural painkillers. Pressing on acupoint sends signal through the nervous system to spinal cord & brain, where chemicals such as endorphins & enkephalins are released. Some of these substances are 10-200 times more potent than morphine. As a result, pain is blocked.
- Anti-inflammatory: causes changes in levels of biochemical messenger molecules involved in inflammation (cytokines), resulting in anti-inflammatory effect both locally systemically.
- Adaptogenic: stimulates release of oxytocin, hormone that switches on relaxation response (parasympathetic nervous system activation / 'rest-and-digest' / 'calm-and-connect'). This counteracts stress response (sympathetic nervous system activation / 'fight or flight'). Enables body to respond positively to stressors, adapt to environmental changes, and resist illness.

Biological mechanisms of acupressure

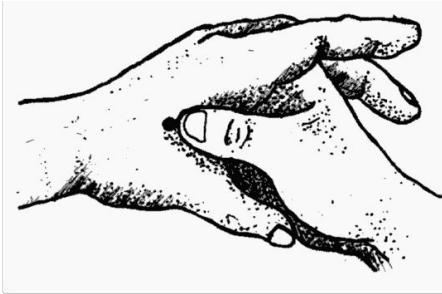
Myofascial

- Releases muscular tension and relaxes shortened muscles which releases pressure on joint structures & nerves, and promotes blood flow
- Tension concentrates around trigger points (muscle knots) - small patches of muscle chronically in spasm - chokes off blood supply to tissue (ischemia), causing lack of oxygen and buildup of metabolic waste products - irritates even more
- When point is pressed, muscle tension yields to finger pressure, enabling fibers to elongate & relax - increased circulation allows blood to flow freely - brings in more oxygen & nutrients, and removes waste
- Breaks up adhesions between adjacent layers of fascia - often present in chronic pain due to lack of movement of tissue over time - allowing normal movement to return
- Stretching of tissue underlying point causes mechanical signals to be relayed through connective tissue - stretch signal causes fibroblasts (cells within the connective tissue that make collagen) to change shape and to secrete anti-inflammatory chemicals

‘ON’ - energy boosting points

	<p>DU-20 Governing Vessel 20 Baihui 'Hundred Meetings' 'crown point'</p> <p>On midline of head, in line with apex of ears.</p> <p>Rest tips of thumbs at uppermost point of ears. Reach middle fingers up to touch at crown of head. Fine-tune location by feeling for most 'active' spot.</p>	<p>raises energy</p> <p>clears mind stimulates and sharpens mental faculties</p> <p>dizziness frontal headache</p>
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LI-4
Large Intestine 4
Hegu 'Joining Valley'

On fleshy mound between first and second metacarpal bones (bones of thumb and first finger).

Press thumb alongside index finger - top of 'mountain' created is the point.

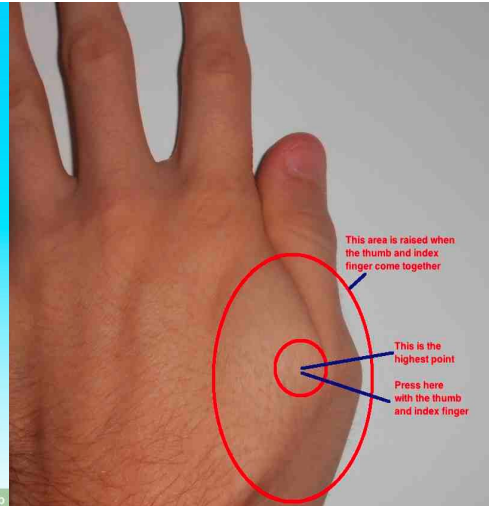
boosts energy


reduces stress (with LIV-3 = '4 gates')

relieves pain anywhere
headaches
toothache

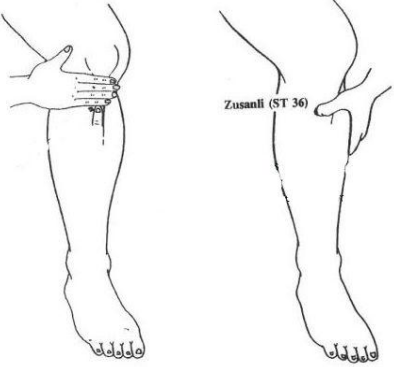
'the great eliminator'

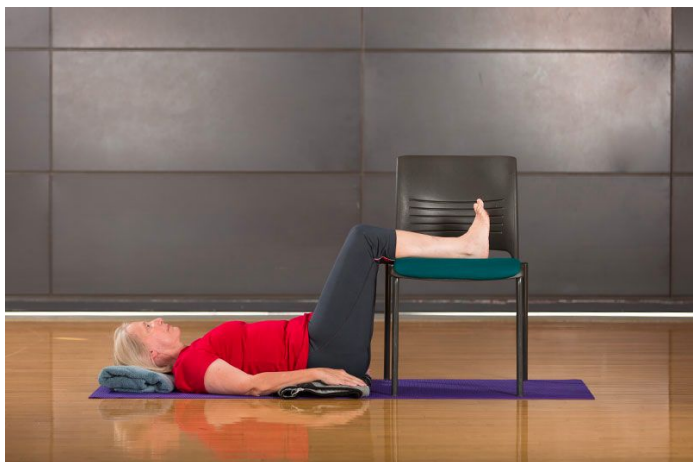
AVOID IN PREGNANCY!
(promotes labor)



	<p>LIV-3 Liver 3 Taichong 'Great Rushing'</p> <p>On dorsum of foot, in depression proximal to the 1st metatarsal space.</p> <p>Press finger into 'valley' between bones of big toe and second toe (about two finger widths above place where skin of your big toe and second toe join).</p>	<p>boosts energy (with LI-4 = '4 gates')</p> <p>reduces stress (with LI-4 = '4 gates')</p> <p>relieves pain anywhere (with LI-4= '4 gates') headaches</p> <p>regulates menstruation PMS period pain</p> <p>'gets things moving'</p>
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	<p>ST-36 Stomach 36 Zusanli 'Leg Three Miles'</p> <p>3 cun below lower border of patella, one finger width lateral from anterior border of tibia.</p> <p>Measure four finger widths down from bottom of knee cap and feel along outer edge of shin bone for tender point.</p>	<p>boosts energy</p> <p>builds & maintains overall health boosts immune system strengthens digestive system</p> <p>shin splints</p>
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‘OFF’ - relaxation points



Yintang

'Hall of Impressions'
'third eye point'

On forehead, at midpoint between medial ends of eyebrows.

Swipe finger back and forwards across center of forehead, midway between eyebrows and feel for a notch or a dip.

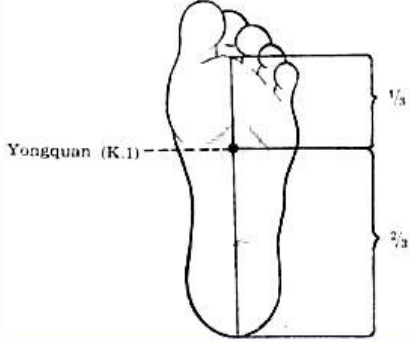
relaxes & calms mind

insomnia
anxiety
agitation


frontal headache (with LI-4)
sinus pain (with LI-4)
nasal congestion (with LI-4)

'the chill pill'

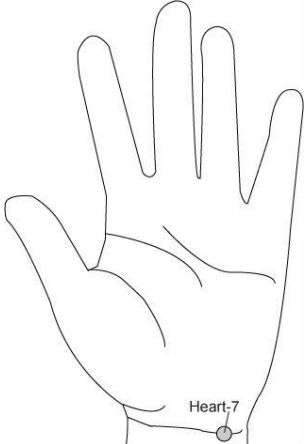


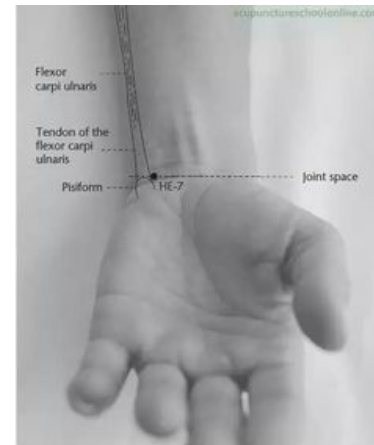
	<p>KID-1 Kidney 1 Yongquan 'Bubbling Spring'</p> <p>On sole, in depression formed when foot is in plantar flexion, approximately at junction of anterior third & posterior two thirds of line from the web between the 2nd & 3rd toes to back of the heel.</p> <p>Point toes - point is located in small depression forms in middle of upper foot.</p>	<p>grounds energy relaxes & calms mind</p> <p>insomnia anxiety agitation</p> <p>headaches dizziness</p>
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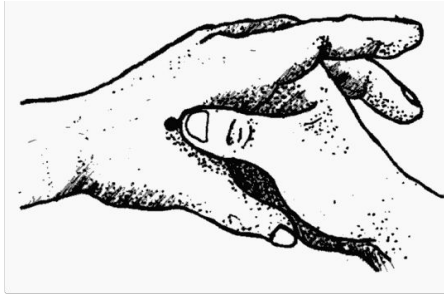
	<p>Ear Shen Men 'Spirit Gate'</p> <p>In center of upper third of ear, in the triangular fossa.</p> <p>Follow anti-helix upwards to where it splits into upper & lower branches. Shen Men is in 'valley' slightly inward and upward from where it splits</p>	<p>relaxes & calms mind</p> <p>insomnia anxiety agitation stress depression</p> <p>pain Addiction</p>
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 <p>A line drawing of a human hand, palm facing up. A small circle on the wrist is labeled 'Heart:7'.</p>	<p>HE-7 Heart 7 Shenmen 'Spirit Gate'</p> <p>On wrist, at ulnar end of transverse crease, in depression on radial side of flexor carpi ulnaris tendon.</p> <p>Trace vertical line down from meeting point of pinky & ring fingers down to wrist crease. Feel for slight indentation in 'corner' between wrist bone & tendon.</p>	<p>relaxes & calms mind</p> <p>insomnia anxiety agitation stress</p> <p>heart palpitations panic attacks</p>
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‘OUCH’ - pain relief points



LI-4

Large Intestine 4
Hegu 'Joining Valley'

On fleshy mound between first and second metacarpal bones (bones of thumb and first finger).

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boosts energy

reduces stress (with LIV-3 = '4 gates')

relieves pain anywhere
headaches
toothache

'the great eliminator'

AVOID IN PREGNANCY!
(promotes labor)



LIV-3

Liver 3
Taichong 'Great Rushing'

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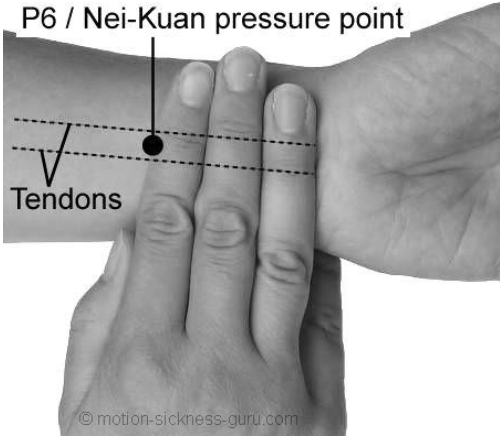
boosts energy (with LI-4 = '4 gates')

reduces stress (with LI-4 = '4 gates')

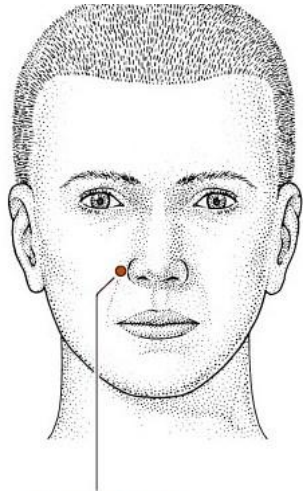
relieves pain anywhere (with LI-4 = '4 gates')
headaches

regulates menstruation
PMS
period pain

'gets things moving'

	<p>P-6 Pericardium 6 Neiguan 'Inner Gate'</p> <p>2 cun from wrist crease, between palmaris longus & flexor carpi radialis tendons.</p> <p>Make fist to emphasize gap between tendons. Place 3 fingers across wrist. Place knuckle of opposite hand into crease between tendons & wiggle up and down to find tender spot.</p>	<p>heartburn nausea hiccups motion sickness</p> <p>relaxes & calms mind anxiety heart palpitations</p> <p>headaches and carpal tunnel syndrome.</p>
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Yingxiang L.I.-20

LI-20

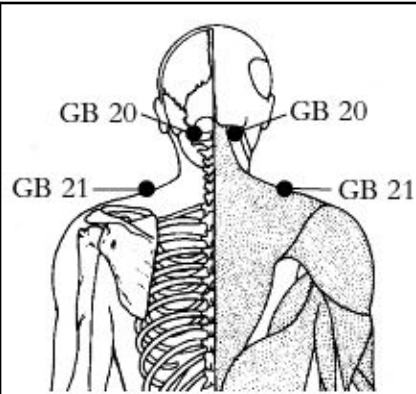
Large Intestine 20
Yingxiang 'Welcome Fragrance'

In nasolabial groove, level the midpoint of lateral border of ala nasi.

In the hollow just outside each nostril. Press diagonally upward, as if you're aiming for your eye on the opposite side

allergies
nasal blockage
runny nose
sinus problems





GB-20

Gallbladder 20
Fengchi 'Wind Pool'

Interlace fingers behind head & press thumbs into depressions at base of skull just lateral to thick tendons of trapezius.

GB-21

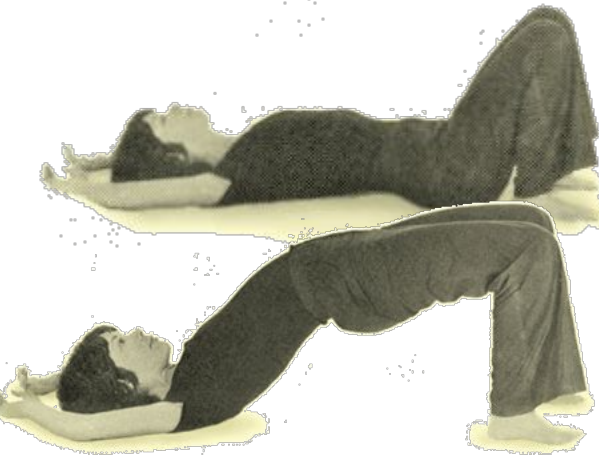
Gallbladder 21
Jiajing 'Shoulder Well'

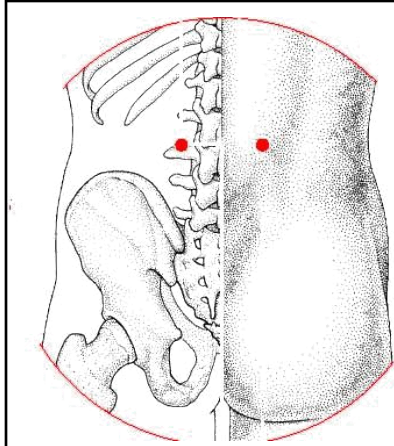
Bring hand diagonally across chest and pinch highest point of trapezius with thumb & middle finger.

neck pain
headaches
shoulder tension

GB-21

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promotes labor





BL-23
Bladder 23

On the back, 1.5 cun lateral to the lower border of the spinous process of the 2nd lumbar vertebra.

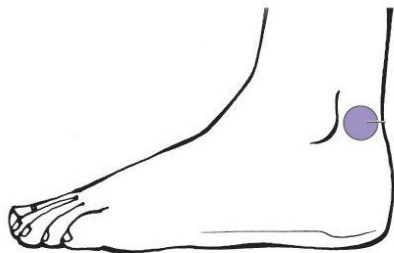
Lie on back, make fists and place knuckles into paraspinal muscles points at level of waist/navel.

Back pain

Fear, anxiety

Kidney & urinary issues



**BL-60**

Bladder 60

Kunlun 'Kunlun Mountains'

On ankle, behind external malleolus, in depression between malleolus & achilles tendon.

Back pain

CAUTION IN PREGNANCY!
promotes labor

