

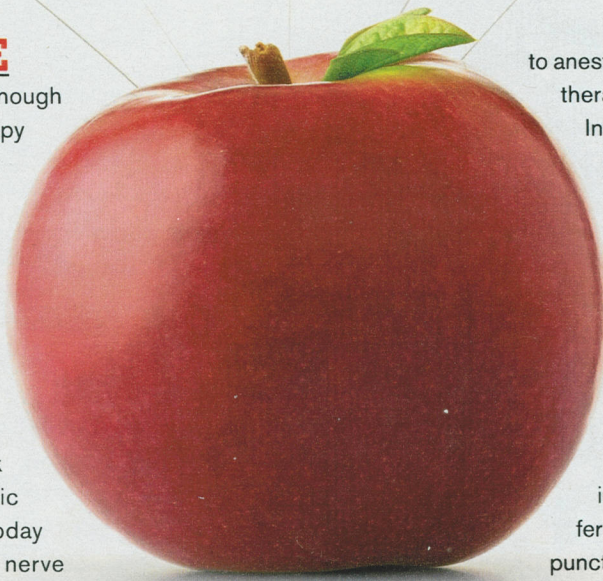
ACUPUNCTURE

Needle-phobes, fear not. Even though this millennia-old Chinese therapy involves needles, they're tiny (in fact, *teensy*), and many people can barely feel them penetrating their skin. "Most patients say acupuncture is relaxing," points out Dr. Fugh-Berman. Why needles? Chinese doctors believed that illnesses were caused by blockages in the body's energy, or qi, and that they could unblock the flow by stimulating specific points in the body. Doctors today know acupuncture stimulates nerve fibers, prompting the brain to release endorphins and enkephalins, opiate-like chemicals that contribute to pain relief, among other things. "Like medication, acupuncture prompts real physiological changes," says Jun Mao, M.D., an acupuncturist and instructor in the department of family practice and community medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. "Neuroimaging studies show that it alters the part of the brain that senses pain." It can also stimulate the release of the feel-good chemical serotonin.

WHAT WE KNOW FOR SURE

🌿 It can relieve pain Several clinical studies have proved that acupuncture can help relieve different types of pain. For instance, when researchers funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine studied people with osteoarthritis of the knee, they observed that those who received acupuncture had a 40 percent decrease in pain and nearly a 40 percent improvement in function. The approach has also received the thumbs-up for treating chronic low-back pain and headaches. The best part? Unlike pain meds, acupuncture has no side effects.

🌿 It can reduce nausea and vomiting No one knows exactly how, but since nausea is triggered by the part of the nervous system that controls involuntary functions and vomiting is controlled by the brain, it presumably interferes with those pathways. Whether you're feeling queasy owing



to anesthesia, pregnancy or chemotherapy, acupuncture can help.

In fact, a 2008 review of 40 clinical trials concluded that acupuncture worked as well as commonly used anti-nausea medications.

🌿 **It can boost pregnancy and delivery rates**

A 2008 review of seven studies found that acupuncture can improve pregnancy and birth rates in women undergoing in vitro fertilization. In the studies, acupuncture was used within one day of embryo transfer.

PROMISING NEW RESEARCH

With more than 250 recent clinical trials on acupuncture listed in the U.S. government's database, researchers are continuing to zero in on more and more ways you can use this holistic approach to stay healthy. Just this year, studies revealed acupuncture may help relieve menstrual cramps, reduce symptoms in people with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, treat depression during pregnancy, ease hot flashes during menopause and aid in post-stroke rehab.

IT WORKED FOR ME

"When I was 42, I wanted to get pregnant but was told by five IVF clinics that they wouldn't accept me because of my age. One doctor told me I had only a 1 percent chance of conceiving. It was devastating, but I didn't want to give up. So I did some research and found an IVF specialist in New York City who supports Chinese medicine to enhance fertility. He told me he couldn't promise anything, but he thought he could help. He prescribed Chinese herbal tonics that I drank three times a day. And I had acupuncture every week. It was amazing—it really helped me relax. On my second round of IVF, in July 2008, I conceived. My pregnancy was healthy, and now I have a beautiful 2-year-old daughter."

Maggie Raker, 46; Long Meadow, Massachusetts