



to the point

Suffering from headaches, insomnia, fatigue? So was **Ute Junker**, until she tried acupuncture.

I felt a bit sheepish when, at my first session, acupuncturist Ray Ford asked what my problem was. I didn't actually have anything particularly wrong with me – well, beyond what many busy people have wrong with them: I was always tired, I didn't sleep well, got headaches and period pain. For many of us, that's just life. But lately I'd become sick of being tired, and decided to give acupuncture a go.

Acupuncture has been used in China for over 2000 years to treat everything from pain and immune function to asthma and neurological problems. The theory is that acupuncture regulates the functioning of mind and body by treating the flow of qi in the body. Qi (usually translated as "energy", but Ray suggests "vapour from food" is a more accurate translation) is a force which moves around the body, warming and nourishing it. When qi gets blocked, imbalances occur, which manifest as pain and dysfunction. Needles are applied to specific points to stimulate the energy flow and fix the problem.

pins and needles

The needles don't appear right away. First, I fill in a long questionnaire about my complaints. Then Ray takes me through each point in detail. Though I'm not aware of it at the time, he's carefully scrutinising me for visual clues to my condition: everything from the colour of my face to the way I talk (apparently revealing tight jaw muscles, a sign of tension). Then he takes my pulses (in Chinese medicine, you have more than one pulse) and finally, he brings out the needles.

Because my problems are "chronic" – that is, I've had them all for a long time

ray ford's acupuncture tips

- Your practitioner should have completed a four-year degree and be member of a professional acupuncture society
- Your practitioner should use sterile, disposable needles
- Your practitioner should indicate at the beginning of the treatment approximately how many visits it will entail
- Don't forget, acupuncture is covered by many health funds

– they won't be fixed in just one session. Ultimately, the treatment takes almost three months. In this first session, I lie on my back and he needles four points: in my stomach, arm, leg and foot.

Even though the needles look alarmingly long, they don't hurt at all. In fact, I barely feel them go in. The only reason I even know they're in is because there's a slight tingle, a bit like a very mild electric shock. It feels quite nice. I do shut my eyes as they go in, but eventually, I sneak a peek. It looks very odd, but I soon get used to it.

At my first session, I complained that I was having a hard time getting to sleep. Although I was always tired, it was taking

me two or three hours to fall asleep every night. Within an hour of the treatment, my eyes got so heavy, I could barely keep them open.

Since I was at home, I decided to take a half-hour nap. I lay down, and woke up two hours later. I cruised through the rest of the day and by 10pm, was falling asleep again. It was as if a gate had been opened, and all the sleep I'd been missing out on had come pouring in.

more sleep, more energy

Not every session offered such dramatic results, but I could feel the changes from week to week. Ray supplemented the needles with other treatments, such as placing small herb sachets on my skin and burning them. It was a bit like having incense burned on your stomach – odd, but not unpleasant.

As treatment continued, I started sleeping better, was having fewer headaches and less frequent period pain, plus I had much more energy.

But there was another bonus in store for me, too. As Ray took my pulses one day, he suddenly asked, "Are your extremities often cold?" In fact, I'm notorious for always having cold hands and feet. "I can fix that," he said, brandishing a needle. And you know what? Since that day, four months ago, I've never had cold hands again.

contact details

Ray Ford Acupuncturist
12 Ridge St
North Sydney, NSW
(02) 9954 3342
www.rayfordacupuncture.com.au