

The Meridians through which Qi (energy) flows

The **meridians** are the channels through which the flow of **Qi** around the body is maintained and balanced.

There are fourteen major meridians. These are positioned vertically – in a symmetrical network – on either side of the body.

A further twelve meridians on each side of the body link to the major organs. Each of these meridians is named after and shares the same physical and emotional characteristics of the organ to which it is linked.

Where the **Qi** is blocked defines the nature of the illness. An obstruction of **Qi** in the heart meridian would create symptoms of illness that were associated with the physical and emotional aspect of that organ.

These symptoms also change depending on the nature of the obstruction. For example, a disturbance in the level of **Yin Qi** would create symptoms entirely different from a disturbance in the level of **Yang Qi**. (See definition of Yin and Yang.)

There are over three hundred and sixty one **acu-points** grouped along the **meridians**. It is at these points that the meridians are closest to the surface of the skin and are therefore more accessible to treatments such as **Acupuncture** and **Shiatsu**.

Each of these points is used to treat illness by unlocking the flow of Qi. If we instinctively press upon a certain part of our head when we have a headache then we are unconsciously using an acu-point to treat a ailment by releasing the flow of Qi.



Qi Energy – the source

Qi is defined as energy and is essential to life. Contained within all living things it is the source for all movement and change within the universe.

The energy force of Qi runs throughout our bodies and consists of all physical, emotional, mental and identity aspects of life. The free flow of this energy is vital to health and wellbeing.

It is also defined in terms of **Yin** and **Yang**. **Yang Qi** is associated with the skin and muscles and protects and warms the body. **Yin Qi** is associated with the internal organs and nourishes the body. When Yin and Yang are balanced Qi flows normally. Too much of either causes ill health by obstructing the flow of Qi.



How stimulating the 'acu-points' works

Several disciplines within Traditional Chinese Medicine use stimulation of the **acu-points** to ease the flow of Qi and return the body to a state of dynamic balance.

Research has discovered that the **acu-points** correspond to high instances of electrical conductivity upon the surface of the skin. It is believed that these instances of high conductivity may be directly related to the occurrence of **gap junctions** at these points.

A **gap junction** is a protein complex that forms a corridor between cells and enables information-carrying electrical impulses to be passed throughout the body. A **gap junction** is also known to increase electrical conductivity.

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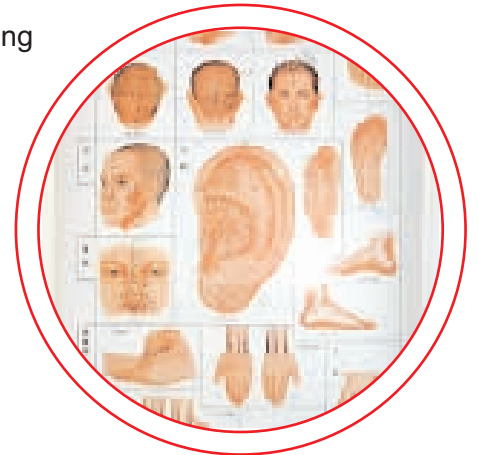
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An **acu-point** is an area with a high electrical conductivity and subsequently a high density of electric current. It is therefore at these areas that the flow of surface electric current converges. At the points of electrical convergence it is possible to cause a change from one state to another.

Electromagnetic energy moves around the body in several directions. The areas of different electric flow are bounded by the meridians. **Acu-points** are located at various points along the meridians.

This has given rise to the theory that **acu-points** are part of what are known as **organisational centres**. These are small clusters of cells that have similar characteristics to **acu-points**. The high instance of **gap junctions** in an **organisational centre** suggests a high instance of intercellular communication.



The stimulation of the **acu-points** is thought to affect the electric fields. This has the potential to change some bodily processes and prevent the occurrence of others. In addition, the manipulation of the **acu-points** is also thought to activate the **organisational centres** of the relevant parts of the body. As the **organisational centres** are responsible for growth and development within the body, the healing process may be facilitated more rapidly and without many of the side effects of conventional medicine.

More about the Five Elements

The Chinese use the theory of the Five Elements to define and explain naturally occurring phenomena. The interactions between the five elements – **Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water** – influence the **dynamic balance** upon which all life depends.

Dynamic balance is the term used to describe the harmonious fluctuation of elements in a balanced fashion.

Although many cycles and interactions are classified by the Five Elements, the most important to Chinese Medicine is the **Correspondence Theory**.

Each element is subdivided into categories that describe its physical and emotional characteristics. These categories include direction, movement, colour, taste, and emotion.

For example, water is described as north (direction), downward (movement), blue (colour), salty (taste), worry (emotion).

There are four main cycles of interaction between the Five Elements. The **Generating Sequence** and the **Controlling Sequence** indicate the movements of the elements in a balanced manner. When the relationship between the elements becomes imbalanced destructive sequences occur.

The **Correspondence Theory** and the four sequences of interaction provide a model for the bodily processes. Each organ in the body corresponds to a particular element and interacts with the others according to the four sequences. By using these theories in conjunction with the concepts of **Yin and Yang** and **Qi**, a practitioner is able to classify a disease according to its symptoms and return the body to health by removing elemental and energetic imbalance.



The I Ching – a philosophical basis

The **I Ching** dates from 1200 BC. Although originally used primarily as a system of divination, the I Ching contains much of the philosophical basis for **Chinese medicine** and **culture**.

Traditionally divination was carried out using **yarrow sticks**. These were manipulated until only a certain number remained. The nature of the remaining number – **odd (Yang)** or **even (Yin)** – created the first line (**Yao**) of the divinatory symbol.

The process was repeated until a set of six horizontal lines was obtained. These were known as **hexagram (Gua)** and revealed the nature of the prediction. The 64 possible combinations of lines are interpreted in the I Ching.



All interpretations are based upon the **Tao of Change**. Tao means truth and the **I Ching** is thought to contain the truths of heaven and earth. The Chinese believe that everything in the universe is in a process of continuous movement and evolution. This theory is based upon centuries of careful observation of natural forces.

In order for one to be able to adapt to change, it is necessary to understand the rules that govern it. In the **I Ching** the knowledge of these rules is recorded and explained in a manner that is relevant to daily life.

Yin and Yang – balance & contrast

The Chinese believe that everything within the Universe is either Yin or Yang:

Yin = Female attributes such as inactivity and darkness, coldness and moisture

Yang = Masculine attributes such as activity, light, warmth and dryness

From a western viewpoint, night and day are good examples of the way in which Yin and Yang is attributed. Our perception of night is of darkness, coldness, and inactivity. In contrast we credit day with the concepts of light, warmth and movement. In Chinese classification, **night is considered Yin** and **day Yang**.



The balance between Yin and Yang is not static but flows in the same way that night follows day and each contains elements of the other. This movement is known as the **dynamic balance**.

One of the main objectives of Traditional Chinese Medicine is the maintenance of the **dynamic balance**. Each part of the body is characterised as either Yin or Yang. As a general rule the **functions of the body are Yang** while the **structure of the body is Yin**.

Utilising numerous Chinese medical disciplines – acupuncture, herbalism, moxibustion, acupressure, and massage techniques such as Tui-na – the patient is guided into obtaining and maintaining a dynamic balance.