

Acupuncture for Kids is *Not* Scary

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Do you ever wish you could go back and relive portions of your life, with the knowledge you have today? If only I had known about acupuncture and good nutrition when my kids were little!

Like many of you, the study of TCM came later in my life; I celebrated my 40th birthday in college. By then, our children were mostly grown. If I only knew then, what I know now, things would have been so different. I had no idea how much acupuncture could have changed their lives.

I had the incredible opportunity to study pediatrics with Alex Tiber, world-renowned pediatric specialist, at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in San Diego. Alex has a gift for working with children. Here are some gems of TCM wisdom I found in my notes from one of his courses on pediatric tuina:

- The meridians begin development at the time of conception and continue throughout pregnancy.
- When a child is born the meridians are already fairly well developed, but not fully.
- They continue transformation until about the age of 7-8.
- When a child is born, the condition of the meridians mirrors the child's birth constitution.
- BUT—if you treat a child with acupuncture and good nutrition during their initial 7-8 year period, you can CHANGE the constitution of the child.

That is powerful information! You can literally transform a child's life with acupuncture and good nutrition in the first eight years!

We are facing a huge crisis in the health of our next generation of kids—mainly because of diet and environmental factors. Despite vaccines, increased spending on healthcare and more well baby/child care, kids are getting sicker (especially in the last 20 years) with chronic illness such as allergies, asthma, ADD, Autism, depression, and obesity.

It is scary to think what researchers are projecting for generation Z. According to healthcare statistics, the lifespan of the current generation is the first of many generations expected to have a shorter life span than that of their parents. Pediatrician William Sears, M.D. claims: "If these trends continue, America's children face a future filled with sickness rather than health, of weakness rather than strength, of sadness rather than happiness."

These statistics are shocking and quite depressing, but there is really one HUGE thing we can do to help solve this problem. Wouldn't it be great if more acupuncturists were treating children? Imagine the possibility of correcting disharmonies that will surely lead to adult medical issues, simply by changing a child's constitution through acupuncture and dietary therapy during the first eight years!

Do you want to make a difference in the world by treating more kids in your clinic? You can!

In this article, I'm going to discuss common obstacles practitioners may encounter when treating

children, along with modern solutions to create a kid-friendly clinic.

Fear of Treating Kids

Many acupuncturists are nervous about treating kids. While pediatric acupuncture is a specialty for some practitioners, many of us only treat kids occasionally.

If you have a desire to treat more kids in your clinic, I suggest you focus some of your CEUs on a good pediatric course to brush up on childhood ailments, common pediatric patterns, dietary therapy, and possible red flags. There are several great pediatric acupuncture specialists. Do a Google search for "pediatric acupuncture training." I suggest you find someone who has years of clinical experience treating children, is NCCAOM certified, and offers a mentoring program. In our day and age, we have the option of doing CEU's from home. This is great for basic introductory training. Having the option of mentorship training later will help you fine-tune your skills.

Diagnostic Challenges

Diagnosing kids with traditional TCM diagnostics is not always easy or effective. Think about all the considerations involved in diagnosing an adult patient. We ask questions, inspect the tongue, feel the pulse, and palpate to develop a diagnosis and treatment strategy.

Small children can't give reliable information about what is happening with their health. Even parents cannot objectively answer questions about a small child's hearing, dizziness, nightmares or the quality/location of their pain, for example.

Steven Birch, pediatric shonishin instructor, teaches that pulse diagnosis is not feasible at a young age because the pulses are not fully developed. According to classic TCM textbooks, one solution to pulse diagnosis is evaluating the vein on the first finger. This method is supposed to be effective until the age of three. After the age of three, the three pulse positions may be too close to be palpated by individual fingers, so the examiner must use the thumb to get an overall impression of all three positions. For older children, the examiner must keep the fingers close together.

How many practitioners have the opportunity to treat children frequently? I know I don't. If you are not feeling pediatric pulses very often, it will be hard to decipher what you're feeling. I want to be effective at treating kids, but it isn't my goal to have a full pediatric clinic. In most larger cities, there are pediatric specialists to whom you can refer. On the other hand, many practitioners, like myself, who live in small rural areas, develop a "family practice" out of necessity.

Digital Meridian Imaging (DMI), also known as meridian graphing, is an excellent option for diagnosing children because babies and children can't give us detailed information about symptoms or how their body feels. All diagnostic theories link back to the condition of the meridians. The pulse tells you what is happening in the meridians, and thus the organ itself. Pattern diagnosis is also based on the condition of the meridians. Internal diseases are reflected in the meridians. Finally, acupuncture treatment is aimed at regulating the flow of qi within the meridian systems.

By measuring electrical skin resistance at the source points on a child, you obtain an objective measurement of the condition of the meridians—indicating excess, deficiency and/or left to right imbalance within each meridian. Simple treatment of the Tonification, Sedation or the *Luo* points will create balance in the meridian system. Our final goal for treatment is always to put the body back into balance so the body can use its own divine functioning power to heal itself. Kids do not need complicated treatment strategies. Simply tonifying and sedating the channels often brings excellent results.

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