

Tuina Strategies for Acupuncturists

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At seven o'clock in the morning, on his mother's birthday, Dr. Bailey woke his mother and told her to get ready for a special tennis match. His mother, a passionate tennis player, claimed that any day that began with some challenging, zen-like tennis would be a good day, so for her birthday, Dr. Bailey made special arrangements for her to play with a professional at an oceanfront resort.

At the first suggestion of tennis, a glow washed over her face, and Ms. Bailey sprang out of bed. Just as quickly, she yelped, then froze as her left leg went out from under her. "Help, son," she pleaded. "Please remove this dagger from my leg!"

Here's where the American Express commercial that insists you not leave home without your card could apply to acupuncturists. Don't be caught anywhere, at any time, without your needles. It's like a superhero leaving their special powers on the night stand.

In acupuncture school, in addition to needles, Dr. Bailey learned *tuina*, a method of massage that uses the same principles as acupuncture. With proper training, Dr. Bailey could use his fingers and hands to balance the *qi*, deal with acute muscle spasms, and even restore the function of stagnant internal organs, but he never developed his *tuina* skills because it was so exhausting for his hands, and the results weren't nearly as profound as his traditional acupuncture work. It was inefficient for his business because he could only treat one patient at a time. The bottom line was, he was simply not confident in the results he could achieve with *tuina* as he had learned it.

As a result, Dr. Bailey rarely performed *tuina* on his patients. Instead, he would periodically hire a massage therapist to work alongside him to relax the patient and soften up areas of muscular tension. Yet he continued to search for new strategies for pain relief and deep muscle and connective tissue softening and lengthening.

Recently, a patient of Dr. Bailey's told him about her experience with a manual therapist who had used just his forearms to treat her chronic back pain. Dr. Bailey listened to the patient, and began to investigate for himself. He was so impressed that he became determined to learn this modality. Within a few months, he had incorporated the new *tuina* strategy into his practice.

Here's how the technique works: the patient lies on a massage table, fully clothed. All moves use a towel over the top of the affected area for better traction. Before treating an area, always gently palpate to find your target area (where the tissues are most bound). It is usually very evident; it feels like speed bumps of soft tissue in the midst of otherwise healthy, pliable muscle. Sink in with the forearm (using specialized angles and contact points) very slowly, maintaining even pressure. The forearm spreads the tissues from points alongside the areas of highest density, just like spreading chunky-style peanut butter on bread by pushing behind it with a butter knife. The movement is completely effortless for the practitioner, as if one simply leaned on a table while rotating one's trunk.

It's best to work very lightly at first until the muscles and connective tissues become more flexible. Then, the acupuncturist will notice that he or she can begin pressing harder and establishing more suppleness and elasticity.

While this sounds like deep tissue massage, Rolfing or countless common forms of bodywork, it's not. The precise moves were invented by a physical therapist with nearly 60 years of full-time experience using this particular approach alone. He has become able to rapidly and successfully treat disk herniations; migraines; bone spurs; sinus problems; hearing blockages; rotator cuff tendonitis; carpal tunnel syndrome; and countless other injuries.

By the time Dr. Bailey's mother injured her hip, his *tuina* practice had blossomed; many patients began requesting *tuina* over acupuncture. He then went to work on his mother's spastic hip. After two sets of three to five passes on and around the contracted area, he instructed her to get up and walk around. To her amazement, the pain had receded 90% after roughly 15 minutes of treatment. They went to breakfast together, and as she started moving more, the soreness subsided. By the time they got to the tennis courts, she was able to hit with the tennis pro, with only a faint inkling of pain.

The personal and professional rewards of this practice have inspired Dr. Bailey and many other acupuncturists to pursue this *tuina* technique further. Dr. Bailey admits that he's still attached to his needles, but in a fix, when age-old tricks don't work, he now has a powerful backup tool.

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