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I TRIED IT: Acupuncture

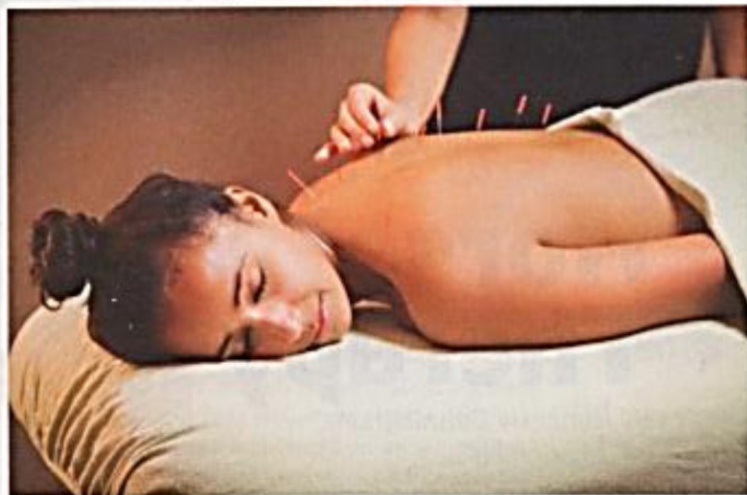
By Archana Ram, 28, Hillcrest

Sticking needles into our bodies—ancient wisdom or pointless masochism? That's what I wanted to figure out when I began my acupuncture treatment at Conception Wellness in Pacific Beach. The ancient Chinese technique involves penetrating needles into your skin at specific points to stimulate the body. In my case, I wanted help for chronic back pain—a result of my pedestrian bag lady lifestyle from a recent four-year stint in Manhattan—and new stresses stemming from a new city, new job, and new puppy.

Lisa Pugliese, a registered nurse-turned-acupuncturist, first asked me about my lifestyle. What was I eating? How was I sleeping? How nurtured did I feel by my relationships? That, along with muscle testing, dictated where the needles would go, and while some inflicted a slight prick, others I barely registered. (The sensations vary per person and can depend on everything from what you ate that day to your menstrual cycle.)

Surprisingly, needles weren't the main focus of my treatment—but I didn't mind. Beyond feeling relaxed with my eyes closed and music streaming, the needles never did much for me. In fact, when Lisa inserted five "to-go" needles in me for four days, my back hurt so much that I took them out by day three.

She was instead more eager to recommend cookbooks and yoga classes, believing that diet and exercise play a crucial role in the healing process. She also tried two other Eastern techniques to address what she deemed was blood stagnation in my back. The first was cupping, in which small glass jars are suctioned onto ailing muscles. It's meant to suck up the blood and then release it, but cupping didn't penetrate as deeply as I would've liked. What I did go nuts for, though, was when she lightly suctioned one jar and ran it up and down my back like a reverse massage. The feeling of having my muscles being pulled up and away was total bliss.



The more dramatic procedure was *gua sha*, in which the skin undergoes repeated pressure strokes. With each "scrape," it felt like Lisa ran a rolling pin over my tightest

spots, giving me that *Oh yeah, that's the spot* reaction I so badly wanted. The procedure left scary bruising on my back that faded within a few days, but it was worth it to get my muscles loose.

Four sessions later, my stress had decreased, and my back wasn't perfect, but it was better. I didn't know which of the treatments deserved the credit, but as it turned out, they all do. All of the pieces—acupuncture, cupping, *gua sha*, diet, exercise, sleep—figure into the healing process with Chinese medicine. It's not about prodding yourself with needles and expecting a cataclysmic reaction; it's about incorporating acupuncture into a healthy lifestyle to see subtle but long-lasting changes. I love the theory, but my wallet doesn't feel the same way. Eastern medicine can be costly, and considering the slow and subtle effects, the bills add up. For now, I'll pass on the needles and go with the most bang for my buck (and back): *gua sha*.

YOU TRY IT

BE PATIENT. If you're used to popping pills as a quick fix, keep an open mind. It can take more time to see results with Chinese medicine.

BE STRATEGIC about when you go. Like *gua sha*, cupping can leave bruises for a few days. Schedule appointments after the gala where you plan to wear a backless dress.

DRINK WATER. Hydration means looser and more flexible muscles that can bounce back easily after procedures.

\$ An acupuncture treatment at Conception Wellness is \$90; new patient consultation is \$150.

36 MORE WAYS TO GET HEALTHY By Hilary Achauer

1 **Fast and furious.** Get toned, fit, and on with your day at the new 30-minute Fast Class from **Function First** in Mission Hills. functionfirst.com

2 **Get a surfer's body...** without getting wet at **Surf-SET 858** in La Jolla. The surfboard-based workout combines aerobic fat burning with lean muscle building. surfset858.com

3 **Now open.** Visit **Yoga Six's** new UTC location, which offers classes for the beginner to the advanced yogi, plus barre and fitness sculpting classes. yogasix.com

4 **Stop running alone.** Join **West Coast Road Runners** for training schedules, Saturday morning group runs, coached track sessions, and educational seminars. wcoadrunners.com

5 **Sweat in style.** **HERevolution** in Solana Beach, an all-women's multisport shop, offers bike workouts and various clinics. hertrishop.com

