



DOES ACUPUNCTURE WORK?

GAY MAN PUTS CLASSICAL FIVE-POINT ACUPUNCTURE TO THE TEST AT LONDON'S KITE CLINIC.

WORDS DANNY HOLTER

Despite the fact that I hate injections, acupuncture has always been tempting to me. I think it's because it seems quite extreme – submitting your body for a good old puncturing, albeit with extremely fine needles. The allure of ancient Eastern wisdom, combined with acupuncture's logical-sounding intention to treat both mind and body, means that feeling those needles for the first time wasn't so far behind 'sex', 'parachute jump' and 'acid' on my life's to do list. At 28 I still haven't done the parachute jump but then I haven't bought and renovated a house or, more pressingly, finished a major project for my job, which is actually on the should-have-been-done-yesterday list. Add on the fact that I've been larging it on the club scene every weekend for most of the year and you get one gay guy who is stressed out, lacking energy and finding it hard to manage his time. I do not want to carry on like this – I need change. I'm ready to give acupuncture a try and that's why I'm walking into Kite Clinic on London's Bond Street. This isn't the cheapest part of town but I've heard that a course of 'classical five element' acupuncture here is among the very best in Europe. It's also a gay owned and run business, so I'm thinking they may be better able to understand my stresses.

The First Session

I run into the clinic a little late, as usual. I'm sweating, revisiting my fear of needles. Ridiculous as this sounds, I've also spent the entire tube journey weighing-up the possibility that my employers sent me the emails advertising the clinic in an attempt to lure me there and find out more about me. I told you I'd been caning it a lot. Thankfully, the clinic is an immediately calming, beautifully designed space. I meet my practitioner, Gerad Kite and head up the sweeping staircase to the treatment room. Gerad asks me a series of questions to build a picture of my mental and physical status. I tell him about the partying, the drinking, the colds, the insomnia, the stress at work and those occasional ludicrously paranoid episodes. With his help I make some clear goals and plans to change my behaviour – one of which is giving up my six-a-day coffee habit completely. Gerad talks me through the basics of classical five-element acupuncture, which was developed in China over 2000 years ago as a preventative health care system. 'The ancient Chinese celebrated the fact that every human being is unique,' he tells me. 'Change doesn't happen overnight, but people on a course of treatment will feel better emotionally, physically and spiritually.' Gerad stresses that acupuncture

is not, like so much Western medicine, a quick fix treatment. 'The person is treated, not a bunch of symptoms,' he explains. It all sounds cool, holistic and reassuring – but will it do anything for me?

Needle In The Skin

Lying on my back, ready for the first needle, I ask Gerad what he's looking for. 'In the first session I'm going to ascertain what blockages you have in your system and where you need help,' he tells me. 'You might experience an immediate, strong after-effect – possibly an energy rush. Or you may even feel unwell. It's different for everyone, but this should give a sudden kick to your system.' Gerad taps around my stomach, and then prepares to insert the first needle, just above my liver area. Tense, I close my eyes, but Gerad reassures me that it won't hurt. Sure enough, as he's telling me the needle has gone through my skin I can barely feel anything. Then comes a slight aching sensation. 'This is the spot, I just need to twist to unblock it.' The aching suddenly intensifies and focuses and I laugh out loud. It's not pain in the nasty sense but a definite, intensely-focused thud to the system. Gerad tells me that it's not a nerve he's touched on but the blocked area. Next up he does the same thing to my shoulder and, slightly alarmingly, my inner eye sockets. His calm manner keeps me relaxed throughout though, and the final needle goes in just above the heart area of my chest. This produces a much stronger boom of an ache, followed by a flood of relaxation across my body. Gerad sets me up with another appointment and asks me to note any significant changes to my health and emotions over the next seven days.

Ringin' The Changes

I walk out of the clinic and down a crowded Oxford Street feeling surreal, calm and elated. Maybe it's the relief at getting those needles out of the way, or just unburdening my problems with a stranger, but it seems deeper. I'd been stressed and irritable over the preceding days but I have a romantic evening with my boyfriend followed by grade A sex. My boyfriend's doubts about 'this acupuncture rubbish' have certainly retreated. I give up my coffee habit and endure two days of cold turkey at work but sleep much more soundly and feel optimistic, calm and energetic. But a few days later the moody stress is back and by the time my next session comes around my boyfriend is practically pushing me there.



Having experienced some notable effects, but being mindful that they might be down to dumping my coffee habit, I quiz Gerad on the philosophy behind five-point acupuncture.

Back To Nature

For Gerad, the key aim of the treatment is to get my mind and body back in synch with the natural cycle and allow me to access 'my true potential'. I have a session every week for three weeks, and the improvements in my wellbeing seem to be building. The insomnia is gone, the libido is up and I'm dealing with work far more efficiently. I've got more power at the gym and I also feel a sense of balanced optimism. Importantly given my workload, I've been in good health, despite having that sensation of a cold trying to take hold a couple of times. Of course, I'm constantly asking myself 'is this psychosomatic?' but I seem to be in a better place than before the treatment began. It's noticeable also, that I get the energy dips in the last couple of days before the next treatment. The dip I experience just before session four is particularly strong, but I don't tell Gerad that the all-night booze-binge I went on at the weekend might have played a part. After tapping points on my body Gerad looks a little concerned. He tells me he needs to do some 'emergency work' to get me back on track. The after-needle aches are deeper than usual this time but at the end of the session Gerad says I'm ready to stretch the next sessions far further apart. Gerad explains that it's important to keep up regular treatment to get the long-term benefits. As a gay man, he also understands that we often experience greater stresses (some self-inflicted) than others. 'Gym culture as a means of developing the body has been a part of gay life for a long time,' he notes. 'But developing ourselves as people has largely been overlooked as we don't know where to go.'

Surer Steps

On the eve of my final treatment I'm definitely a fair bit surer of my life's direction. No, I don't quite feel like a completely new person but I am markedly more in control. I haven't had a cold for three months, I'm bossing my work

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rather than the other way round and I'm sleeping peacefully. Overall, I've been impressed with the way Gerad has helped me identify the problems in my life and enabled me to come up with some solutions. I've come to look forward to the sessions and, yes, to love the feeling of those very fine needles finding, and releasing, 'the block'. Having always had some instinctive belief in holistic Eastern treatments I am clearly not the most impartial, or scientifically qualified, of observers. But even if some of this is in the mind, I do feel that my self and body have started to get on with each a whole lot better than before. **-AXM**

FIVE-POINT ACUPUNCTURE IN FIVE

Holistic. Acupuncture aims to treat the whole person, not just the symptoms.

Reviving. By helping a person 'get back to their true nature' acupuncture claims to make us healthier in mind and body and more able to deal with stresses.

One needle. You are not treated as a pincushion, and there is no real pain – just a dull ache.

Take time. A course typically lasts four to six weeks, but after that the person should have at least a few sessions per year.

It's for life. The idea is to keep your mind and body tuned up to ward off disease and trauma.

KITE CLINIC

Courses of five-point acupuncture are tailored to the individual after an initial consultation, so costs vary. The Kite Clinic also offers Western Medical care (including sexual health screening and HIV care), counselling, nutrition advice and massage.

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