

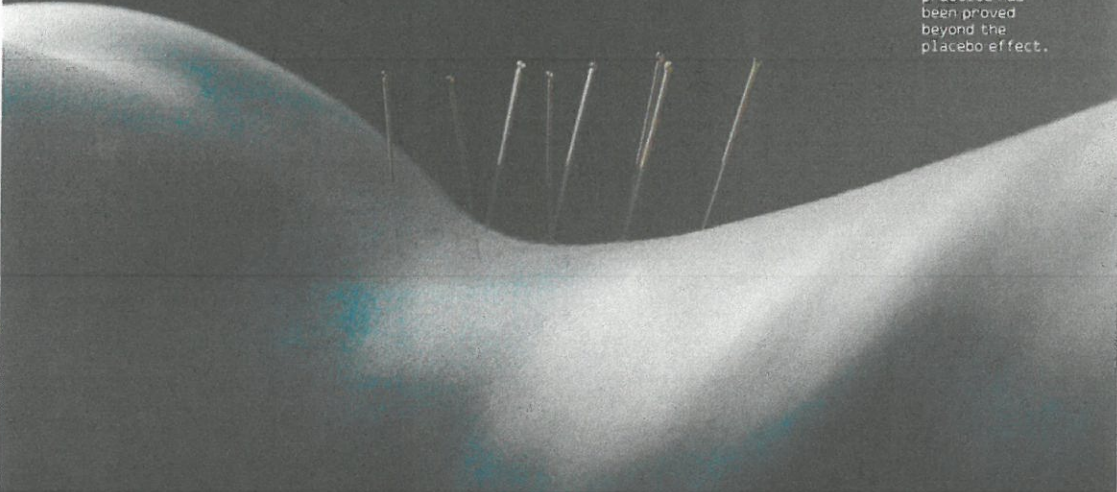
A
USER'S
MANUAL

Alternative Medicine

Find the natural-healing approach that's best for you with this field guide to what really works, from acupuncture to Vinyasa.

By HALLIE LEVINE

← This ancient practice has been proved beyond the placebo effect.



THEY ARE KNOWN AS "ALTERNATIVE," BUT TREATMENTS LIKE MASSAGE THERAPY AND nutritional counseling have moved firmly into the mainstream, with 38 percent of American adults using complementary or alternative medicine. When nontraditional approaches are used in combination with conventional health care, you get the best of both worlds. But how do you know if you should try chiropractic or craniosacral, or even meditation? (And what's the deal with Reiki, anyway?) To help you navigate the sea of choices, we've highlighted the therapies that are most strongly backed by research (some of which may even be covered by insurance). Dive in, and let the healing begin.

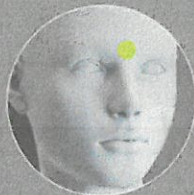
PRESS HERE FOR...

Needles make you queasy? Acupressure uses the same principles as acupuncture, without all the pricking. The next time one of these ailments strikes, try massaging the corresponding point with firm pressure for 5 to 10 seconds.



ANY ACHE ABOVE THE NECK

In a 2009 study, pressure applied to the fleshy area between the thumb and index finger greatly reduced jaw pain. The technique is also used to treat other sources of facial pain, like toothaches, headaches and sinus congestion.



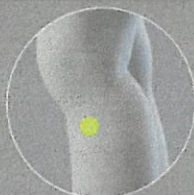
DIZZINESS AND SLEEP WOES

Pressure on the spot right between your eyebrows seems to have very calming effects on the mind, says Don Lee, president of the American Association of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine.



STRESS

As you flex your foot, look for a depression on your sole three finger widths below the web of your second and third toes. "Rubbing there can lower stress hormones, which in turn causes you to stop clenching," says Lee.



FATIGUE

Massaging the point four finger widths below your kneecap, on the outside of your shinbone, has been shown to affect the limbic and paralimbic systems, which help govern energy levels.



NAUSEA AND VOMITING

Turn your palm up and measure three finger widths below your wrist. Massage the depression between your tendons. Research shows that this can help with morning sickness and post-op nausea, and soothe the GI tract.



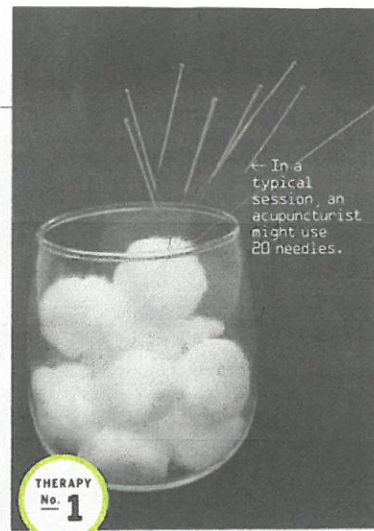
HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

In animal research, pressing below the metatarsal joint (two finger widths below the web of your first and second toes, on the top of your foot) lowered blood pressure. "It's a source point, thought to stimulate a flow of energy," says Lee.



DOES REIKI REALLY WORK?

It's based on the theory that therapists can use their hands to channel positive energy into patients to promote healing. Roughly 1 million Americans go for Reiki and other energy treatments (such as therapeutic touch) every year. According to the National Institutes of Health, there isn't enough research to prove Reiki has direct benefits. But if Reiki helps you feel better, there's no harm in it.



← In a typical session, an acupuncturist might use 20 needles.

THERAPY
No. 1

ACUPUNCTURE

► **WHAT IT IS** An ancient form of Chinese medicine that involves inserting superfine, sterile needles at specific points to balance the life energy—known as chi—along meridians, or pathways, in the body. There's a Western theory behind acupuncture, too: "It triggers the release of endorphins, which are natural painkillers, as well as feel-good hormones such as serotonin," explains Lee. "It also increases blood flow to areas near the needles, which is helpful if, say, a muscle is tight."

► **WHAT IT'S BEST FOR** Alleviating chronic pain in the lower back, neck and knees; reducing the frequency of tension headaches.

► **WHAT TO EXPECT** The acupuncturist will perform an initial evaluation, noting details like your pulse and the appearance of your tongue—both of which are thought to reflect the state of your chi. Then you recline on a chair or table, and she inserts the needles. You'll rest there for the next 10 to 20 minutes. "It usually doesn't hurt, because the needles are so thin and aren't going that deep," says Lee. Most conditions can be treated with six to eight sessions (once or twice a week), plus monthly follow-ups as needed.

► **FYI** Relatively few complications have been reported, but make sure your practitioner is registered in the state.

► **FIND AN ACUPUNCTURIST** You can search listings in your area at nccaom.org. If you feel more comfortable with an MD, check out medicalacupuncture.org.