

Acupuncture for Athletes

By Hasan Tas Sume

Acupuncture can be quite beneficial to those engaged in athletic endeavors. Acupuncture itself is part of a greater medicine called traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). TCM also includes herbal therapies, nutrition, massage, exercises such as Qi Gong and Tai Chi Chuan, and meditation. TCM is good not only for the athlete who has sustained an injury or is recovering from one but also as a preventative course of action. TCM also enhances athletic performance using a multifaceted approach that balances the body's functions allowing all its systems to work properly (efficiently) during exercise.

To understand just how a typical TCM treatment works let's take a look at a common problem such as tendonitis. Tendonitis, which results when a tendon rubs against a bone, ligament, or another tendon, is behind many common overuse injuries. Perhaps the most common form of tendonitis is tennis elbow, which affects not only tennis players but also rowers, carpenters, gardeners, and anyone else who repeatedly bends their arm forcefully. In sports that involve running and jumping, tendonitis is most likely to occur in the knee, foot, and Achilles tendon. Treatment for tendonitis using TCM is unique in that it treats both the branch problem, the local site of injury, and the root problem. In TCM each internal organ relates to a different aspect of the body. The heart relates to blood, the spleen to muscles, kidney to bones, and the liver relates to tendons, nourishing them and keeping them supple. Treating the root of the problem means that the internal organ that relates to the damaged tissue is treated at the same time as the damaged tissue itself. The TCM approach to treating tendonitis is to use acupuncture and herbs to speed the healing process by reducing inflammation at the branch site, the tendon, and strengthening the function of the root, the liver. This approach allows for a more successful outcome and is the secret behind what can *seem* like a miraculous cure.

TCM is effective in treating many different athletic injuries but it is also useful in enhancing an athlete's performance as well as preventing injuries. TCM seeks to balance the body's energies (physiological processes) to establish balance (homeostasis). When the body is in balance it performs more efficiently allowing for peak athletic performance. The multifaceted approach of TCM can give an athlete the competitive

edge through the balancing effects of acupuncture, the safe and legal use of herbs such as Cordyceps, and the mind calming and centering practices of Qi Gong and Tai Chi Chuan. The beauty of TCM is the ability it gives its practitioners to, through careful examination and history taking, to see injuries coming. By using the ability to treat the root of the problem a weakness can be detected at the organ level while it is still subtle and before it leads to injury. As the Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu once said, “Address the small problem while it is still small before it grows and becomes too great to handle”.

Hasan Tas Sume, L.Ac., MSTCM, is the founder of Eightfold (www.8foldhealth.com) and is a California certified acupuncturist. He has been studying and practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine for the past ten years. His martial arts practice began twenty years ago with Karate in high school, followed by Aikido in college. For the past thirteen years he has been studying Northern Shaolin Kung Fu and Tai Chi Chuan.