

**Alice Thorn is both an acupuncture therapist and physiotherapist, with an interest in vestibular physiotherapy. Alice may use both physiotherapy and acupuncture when treating patients.**

**Alice, you are both a physiotherapist and an acupuncture therapist. What came first?**

I graduated as a physiotherapist in Denmark in 1998 and migrated to Melbourne immediately after my graduation. After doing the ACOPRA screening exam (Australian Council of Physiotherapy Regulating Authority) I worked in public hospitals in Melbourne until early 2004. I then moved to Darwin and started working in private practice. I was introduced to TCM acupuncture at this time and I was instantly impressed with the amazing treatment outcomes. I completed my acupuncture course via the Australian Society of Acupuncture Physiotherapists (ASAP) by the end of 2005. This is a comprehensive course based on Traditional Chinese Medicine and Japanese meridian theories.

**What led you to using physiotherapy and acupuncture to treat patients?**

The combination of acupuncture and physiotherapy is ideal in the clinical setting. I use manual physiotherapy techniques to release joint stiffness and muscle tightness. Combining this with needling and other acupuncture methods like cupping and/or moxibustion assists in speeding up tissue healing and provide pain relief.

**You also trained in the area of vestibular disorders. Why an interest in this area?**

While I was in Melbourne, I worked as a neurological physiotherapist in both acute and rehab settings. In particular as a senior neurology and neurosurgical physiotherapist at The Alfred Hospital I was exposed to a wide variety of vestibular disorders and had excellent training opportunities. My interest for vestibular disorders grew with the very diverse and interesting workload I had during these years.

**What is acupuncture?**

Acupuncture originates from China and has been practiced there for thousand of years. Acupuncture involves the insertion of very fine needles through the patient's skin at specific points on the body – the needles are inserted at various depths. Acupuncture points are located along meridians or channels (energy pathways) through which chi runs. Acupuncture is sometimes combined with cupping and moxibustion (heat therapy).

**Meniere's sufferers live a life of anxiety and can have high stress levels. How can acupuncture help those with Meniere's and other vestibular disorders?**

I treat Meniere's primarily in my capacity as a physiotherapist. If anxiety is an underlying factor I can assist in settling the overall level of dizziness by calming and relaxing the patient with acupuncture. I find that subjectively and clinically there is a better treatment outcome when I provide acupuncture at the conclusion of a treatment session.

**In the later stages of Meniere's, many sufferers find acupuncture a helpful management tool. However, in the early stages of Meniere's, episodes occur frequently. Is acupuncture recommended in the early stage of the disease?**

In the acute stage of Meniere's most patients are so severely affected that they prefer to simply rest at home. In the sub-acute phase acupuncture can help reduce the anxiety, fear and stress associated with the vestibular symptoms. Physiotherapy intervention is usually not applied until the initial intense episodes have calmed down. Acupuncture can help this process along.

**Should a Meniere's sufferer talk to their doctor in the early stages before seeing an acupuncturist?**

I work very closely with the local medical practitioners to accurately diagnose and treat any acute onset of vertigo or dizziness. I recommend that anyone experiencing vertigo or dizziness for the very first time consult his or her local GP either before or in conjunction with physiotherapy/acupuncture treatment.

**It has been said that acupuncture is like giving your car a regular grease and oil change to keep it functioning. Do you agree with this idea?**

I am personally not a great fan of the comparison between the human body and a car. However, it is correct that it is thought, that when acupuncture treatment is applied regularly this will maintain good health. Ideally acupuncture should be used to prevent rather than treat illness. In the clinical setting I mostly see patients who are already unwell. In terms of Meniere's I mostly use acupuncture to settle the general feeling of nausea and anxiety associated with (sub)acute episodes.

**Is acupuncture safe?**

Risk associated with acupuncture is low with a competent, certified acupuncture practitioner using sterile, single use needles. You may experience soreness and minor bleeding and bruising where the needles were inserted. Please let your practitioner know if you have a bleeding disorder or take blood thinning medication.

**What are needles made of and why do needles vary in size?**

Acupuncture needles are made of fine grade stainless steel. They are generally very thin. The thickest needle I use is 0.3mm. A guide tube is used to insert the needle through the skin. Mostly the pressure of the guide tube on the skin is felt rather than the insertion of the needle itself. Occasionally the needle may touch a superficial skin nerve, which can sting. I ask the patient to let me know if something hurts so we can decide whether it needs to be removed or replaced.

**What should you expect during an acupuncture treatment?**

I generally use 12-20 needles during a treatment session. Needles may be inserted in the four limbs, back, tummy and face/head. The point selection and amount of needles used depend on the individual presentation. The needles are retained for approximately 20 minutes.

**Is acupuncture covered by private health insurance?**

Yes, if the patient has extras cover under their private health insurance. In my case the treatment is provided under the physiotherapy umbrella, as I am an acupuncture physiotherapist.

**You are based in Darwin. What are your contact details?**

My business name is Alice Thorn Acupuncture & Physiotherapy. My clinic address is inside Energy House, 18 Cavanagh Street, ground floor (not street front). Opening hours are Monday to Friday 8am to 2.30pm. For further information please check my website: [www.aliceacuphysio.com.au](http://www.aliceacuphysio.com.au)