



Easing Women's Transitions with Chinese Medicine: An Interview with Judith Brooks, Licensed Acupuncturist

by Betty Tew



I first met Judith Brooks four and a half years ago, when I sought acupuncture treatment to help ease my transition through menopause. I'd had acupuncture treatments several years before, but through discussions with Judith, I began to have a better understanding about the model of healing that Chinese medicine uses. It's a system of gentle and effective healing modalities that I've come to have a lot of faith in. In very simple terms, acupuncture seeks to balance the yin and yang energies of the body. Yin is cool, damp energy, which, when out of balance, can manifest as sluggishness, while too much yang, the hot and dry energy, can result in inflammatory conditions. The acupuncture needles stimulate points that lie along energy pathways called meridians. These meridians in turn stimulate and balance the organs. When yin and yang energies are balanced, the chi flows easily through the meridians to the organs, resulting in good health and vitality. Chi (or qi) is the healing energy that acupuncture works with to bring a harmonious balance to the body and the nervous system.

Since I've known Judith, I've also learned that she has a deep background in wisdom and healing traditions. I interviewed Judith in her office at Health Touch to learn more about her background and philosophy of healing.

BT: Judith, you have Masters Degrees in both counseling and in Oriental Medicine. What is Oriental medicine?

JB: Oriental medicine includes acupuncture from other countries like Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, so it's not just Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Since I graduated, I've continued my studies in Oriental medicine. I currently study Kiiko Japanese-style acupuncture, which includes a lot of palpitation of the abdomen. I also have ongoing studies with a Daoist master named Jeffrey Yuen, who comes from a long lineage of Daoist masters. I've been studying with him since I moved here in 1999. He teaches in Asheville, NC, several times a year.

BT: So is Oriental medicine more than just the use of acupuncture and herbs?

JB: Yes, Oriental medicine includes diet, lifestyle, exercise, and even spiritual practices like

meditation.

BT: What made you decide to study acupuncture after getting your counseling degree?

JB: There was a part of me that realized there was a lot going on in people's bodies, a connection between their physical pain and mental complaints that doesn't often get acknowledged in traditional counseling.

BT: So you wanted to work more with the mind-body connection?

JB: Yes, body, mind, and spirit. I believe that a lot of emotions are stored in the body and part of what acupuncture does is bridge the mind and the body by unblocking the chi and creating balance.

BT: So then you went back to school?

JB: Yes, I decided to go to New Mexico for massage school. One of my teachers was an acupuncturist and taught acupressure. When I was in a car accident and had a neck injury, she treated my pain with acupuncture and it helped. That experience intrigued me to learn more about acupuncture, so I went back to school for four more years. I was very grateful that I had taken massage classes first because I was familiar with the muscles and the circulatory system, and I was very comfortable touching people.

BT: One of your specialties is women's health. What types of women's health issues do you work with?

JB: I've worked with women with fertility issues, who are having in vitro fertilization (IVF). I use acupuncture to increase their chances of getting pregnant by balancing the energy deficiency in some of the meridians. It helps support their Western medical treatment.

BT: That's fascinating that acupuncture can help women get pregnant. I know you also work with pregnant women as a Doula. Do you also use acupuncture with pregnant women?

JB: Yes, I work with women who have morning sickness, and other pregnancy issues. I just saw a woman this morning whose due date was over a week ago and her cervix was closed, so I did acupuncture on points that help stimulate the cascade of hormones that start labor.

BT: How does that work?

JB: It helps start the contractions. Sometimes they need a treatment every day for three days for the cervix to begin to dilate. I've also done acupuncture at the Women's Birth and Wellness Center in Chapel Hill for pain relief during labor. And I've worked with pregnant women to turn breech babies using moxa on the little toe. Studies in China have shown that when you use moxabustion on certain points, for example, UV 67, it increases fetal activity and helps turn the baby.

BT: Now, if I remember, a breech baby is when the feet are down first, whereas the baby has to be head down for a natural delivery.

JB: Right. Many women would rather try this than have a Caesarian. I've had a lot of success with this. I once turned a woman that was 37 weeks. Usually you need to turn a breech baby by 35 weeks.

BT: That's so interesting. For the benefit of our readers, what is moxa?

JB: Moxa is a type of mugwort that's been cured. The Chinese discovered a long time ago that this particular variety of mugwort helps move the chi in the blood when applied to the point. The way you use it is, you light the stick of moxa, and hold it next to the point. The technique is referred to as moxabustion.

BT: One time you and I were talking about menopause and you said Oriental medicine uses herbs that are balancing to help menopause. How does acupuncture and herbal medicine help menopausal symptoms?

JB: Acupuncture can definitely help the symptoms of hot flashes and night sweats. What's happening is the hormones are decreasing, which creates what Chinese medicine calls a kidney yin deficiency, so they have a lot of excess heat; hence, the hot flashes.

BT: And how do you treat that?

JB: I mainly treat the kidney and liver meridians with acupuncture, which helps to strengthen and balance the yin deficiency. It reduces the hot flashes pretty effectively. Along with herbal formulas that are thousands of years old, the treatment is very effective for menopausal symptoms. I also recommend black cohosh, which is a Western herb.

[Judith pulls out a two-volume textbook called *The Energetics of Western Herbs*.]

JB: I love this book. It's written by a Chinese herbalist, so it explains Western herbs from a Chinese medicine perspective. It says here that black cohosh, the rhizome, harmonizes menstruation and relieves pain, tonifies the reproductive qi, helps PMS, irritability, headache, sleep loss; reduces heat in menopausal syndrome, hot flashes, and helps estrogen deficiency conditions. It also enhances labor and delivery. It's not just for menopause. It also has anti-inflammatory properties when added in other formulas.

BT: So it helps with stress, insomnia, and increases estrogen. I should be taking it.

JB: You can get Remifemin, which is standardized black cohosh, in health food stores. But people don't realize the richness of this particular herb and what else it can do.

BT: That's very interesting. I want to get back to your comment earlier about emotions being stored in the body. My own experience with acupuncture has been that it can be very helpful in dealing with certain emotional states. Do people come to you for emotional as well as the physical relief?

JB: Yes, I work with people who have mild depression, who are anxious or worried, or who are so stressed out they have trouble sleeping. It seems to calm their nervous system. I also work with people dealing with grief.

BT: How does that help?

JB: There are specific points in the body that are spiritual points for grief. It's also important to nurture the heart meridian when you've had a shock to your heart like a major loss. It helps to ease their emotional pain and get perspective. It's not to take away the grief, but gain more acceptance of it.

BT: I think the calming effect of acupuncture is just amazing. Another one of your specialties is massage. Not many people are doing massage and acupuncture together. Why do you like to use them together?

JB: The Chinese call it hands-on therapy. Basically it helps the person relax more, and be more receptive to the acupuncture. It helps to massage certain problem areas so the needles go in easier, if the muscles aren't so tight. Although, you don't always put the needles in the problem area. They're also getting that therapeutic healing touch. I think it's valuable because a lot of people don't get enough touch in their lives.

BT: That's true. Do you think more people are getting interested in acupuncture?

JB: Yes, the media is picking up on it, even spoofing on it, so more people are getting curious about it. The biggest thing though, is that people still associate acupuncture needles with getting shots and it's nothing like that. The needles for getting a shot like a vaccine are hypodermic needles. They're much bigger because they're hollow so they can inject a fluid through them. Acupuncture needles are tiny hair-like needles that barely puncture the skin.

BT: I always liked the fact that you use the very fine needles.

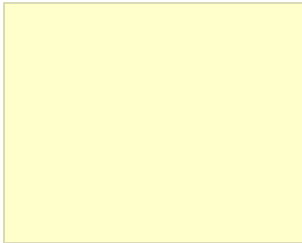
JB: I tend to want to use the finer needles because I think it's less invasive and it's easier for the person to relax enough. Sometimes there is a lot of anticipatory worry about, is this going to hurt?

BT: Yes, and it's good to know the needles are sterile and very safe.

JB: They're always wrapped, sterile and go into a biohazard container when they're used. They're only for one-time use.

BT: How is acupuncture being viewed by the medical community now? Do you get referrals?

JB: I get some referrals from doctors, mostly for pain. I think where it could be expanded is if they could see that it could help more for internal problems other than pain. It's a whole



system of support for the body, whether you're having headaches or menopause or dysmenorrhea. Hopefully, more people will realize its value and access it.

BT: What's the best way for someone to contact you? I know you have a website.

JB: I have a new website that's coming online soon. It's www.meridianhealingnc.com The best way to contact me is by phone. My number is 919-260-1430, and I'm here at Health Touch in Durham Tuesdays through Fridays.

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