

Arrival and Manipulation of Qi

Significance of arrival of Qi

The point of acupuncture is not just to poke holes in people, but to use the needles to bring Qi to the area so that the patient gets benefits from the treatment. This brings therapeutic effect and is the foundation of the tonifying and reducing methods. The basic principles of tonification and reducing (also called sedation in TCM) are:

If there are deficiencies, tonify

If there is excess, fullness or stagnant, use a reducing technique

Using any technique without getting the Qi sensation is rather pointless.

When you insert a needle and it reaches the level in the body where there is Qi, then you get the Qi sensation. When you first tap needle into the dermis you might feel a little something but it's probably not qi. You need to go to the level of Qi to feel the Qi sensation. The Deadman book (and others) define where the various level of Qi will be for the points. Bear in mind that levels of Qi can vary from patient to patient, from season to season and according to weather as discussed in the previous class.

Cat note: OK, that said, you may encounter schools of thought that deviate from this manner of thinking. Some say that the physical body is just one level of the total energetic body and as such any insertion, as long as the needle will stand on it's own, is reaching some level of Qi and is thus beneficial for the patient. Some Japanese acupuncture techniques use a stylus rather than a needle to touch the points rather than inserting into them, stating that stimulation without insertion is a better technique.

Even within TCM there are points which are said to work better with acupressure – no insertion at all – than with acupuncture.

We're here to learn the TCM stuff, obviously, so yes, memorize the standard stuff taught here, but remember that other cultures and philosophies of acupuncture will promote different methods from what we learn.

Signs of Arrival of Qi/Qi Sensation.

Patient Sensations

Qi arrival may present as an array of sensations in the patient's body. Some of the sensations they might tell you about are:

- Sore
- Aching
- Numb

- Heavy
- Distention
- Radiating...
- Like water flowing
- Like energy opening.

Sensations could be slow or fast, gentle, radiating. There might be no sensation at the local area, but sensation at the *distal* area from point. I've had a patient recently who said they felt something heavy on the medial side of their big toenail when I inserted a needle at [Liver 3](#). That makes sense, as this is where the [Liver channel](#) originates. Patients might say they feel the channel "light up." Sometimes they indicate that there is a warm sensation.

Pain: some points might indeed hurt, especially at the ends of fingers and toes. The aforementioned Liver 3 is often an unpleasant sensation too. Pain is often felt right at insertion, but goes away rapidly. I ask people if the needle has settled in or quit hurting and the answer is usually yes. If it doesn't but isn't really painful, you can often tap around the point or tap up the channel either with one finger or in a "drumming" pattern with several fingers. Visualize smoothing out blockages in the channel and this can make the sensation smoother for them.

Sensitive pts might need a shallow insertion—some people can even get acupressure benefits equal to acupuncture benefits.

Good qi sensation might ache, but comfortable—like a good stretch on a tight muscle. Sensation of Qi might be hard to explain if patient has never felt Qi, done qigong, etc. but they usually get the hang of it quickly.

There are styles of acupuncture that don't require that the patient get sensation. As mentioned previously, some Japanese styles only require the practitioner to feel sensation. Needling styles in this mode of treatment are very shallow and cause nothing unpleasant for the patient. This is a qigong-like acupuncture type treatment, though it uses different terminologies than qigong. Those practitioners need to concentrate on sensation of their own bodies and need to strongly extend their own qi into the needles.

Practitioner Sensations

Most commonly the practitioner feels a tightness or vibration. Where there is muscle, you may feel the muscle grab the needle giving a resistance, tightness, or "biting the bait" feeling -- if not a strong grab, perhaps a vibration. Concentrate just on the needle—try to feel it. Do Qi exercises prior. Takes time to become good with the needles. *Concentrate, grasshopper! (and see the last set of class notes – green box)*

Very sensitive practitioners can feel sensation at the organ/area at which treatment is aimed. Might feel the qi with fingers, in the body.

Other Sensations

Nerves: Patients may feel an electrical sensation, especially near big nerves. You don't want this to be too strong—don't manipulate much here!

Blood vessels:

If the needle hits a blood vessel the patient will very likely feel pain—stop! From the practitioner’s side, you can feel resistance when you touch a blood vessel—if you push on you get an empty feeling. Then comes the bleeding...and the resultant pressing!

Muscle:

In muscle, pts feel ache/heavy sensation or distension. Numbness most common near/on nerves, radiating too.

Bone:

That usually hurts. Sometimes it’s a deep ache, sometimes it’s sharp. Depends on the area.

Factors negatively affecting the arrival of Qi

Practitioner:

- Inaccurate location of points
Gotta be accurate to get the Qi sensation.
- Improper depth of needle insertion
Too shallow or too deep are both bad—you miss the qi level for the channel.
Too deep: patient may feel Qi at first, then it gets lost because you went too far.
The more common error for acupuncture newbies however, is inserting too shallow.
- Imperfect manipulation
- Imperfect treatment environment
This affects the patient’s relaxation level—too cold, too hot, too much activity so that patient cannot concentrate.

Patient:

- Weak constitution
Sometimes, no matter how good you are, can’t make it happen. Constitution may be too weak—can use other methods to tonify rather than acupuncture. Herbs or nutrition are the keys to strengthen constitution.
- Needle insensitive
Patients with a high pain threshold often don’t feel much sensation.

Methods for promoting Qi

- Adjust location and depth.
Can also adjust needle angle, but might be too strong of a stimulation
- Wait for the Qi.
If insensitive, qi arrival may be slow. Check your point location and depth and wait a bit.
- Tonifying qi
Tonify the qi for weak constitution patients
- Manipulations
 - Get qi sensation

- Adjust the intensity (usually to make stronger) or direction of Qi sensation (go the way you want it to go).

For some people might take several treatments for the body to learn to play along.

Methods of Manipulation

First notes:

First, it's very important to first regulate your own qi. Once you have done that, you must then make the needle an extension of your hand. Move the qi from your dantian to your whole body, specifically to your hand. Move your qi down the needle. Feel the tip as you manipulate it. This is covered in Class 5 lecture. You'd do well to take the Medical Qigong classes. Forget yourself. Think of the needle. Your intention is the key.

Note: I have the best response when I use 2 fingers (index and 2nd finger) and thumb. More control.

Lift/Thrust

One of the 2 most common techniques.

Follow the needle, don't force it. You can manipulate with either a small range of motion (tonification) or a large range of motion (reduction or tonification in a big muscle with a larger range of qi depth), but do not change the angle of insertion. Also, insert/withdraw to same depth.

Rotating method

One of the 2 most common techniques

First, insert to depth. Then rotate the needle in the hole without changing the angle. When inserting perpendicular can roll back and forth between thumbpad and pad of forefinger. Do not bend the needle.

When you are inserting on an angle, rest the bottom of the needle on the 2nd joint of your index finger and roll it between the edge of this joint and your thumbpad.

Pressing

Insert needle to depth. Press or tap around the base of the needle to "call" the qi. You can press 'behind' the needle to block the qi from going where you don't want it to go. You can also press, tap, or rub lightly along the line of the channel or along the path to guide the qi where you want it to go. Regardless of channel direction, press where you want to direct the qi.

Plucking

Flick with your index finger parallel to the direction you want the qi to go. More like thumping, actually. Alternately, you can just flick it to make the needle wiggle and call the qi. Be careful not to flick upward or the needle can come flying out!

Scraping

Need a coiled or rough handle on your needle to make this work. You scrape either up or down depending on what you want the qi to do in order to make a vibration within. Don't bend the needle!

Shaking

More like a pendulum motion with a small range. You can also "stir," even stirring the needle right out of the skin as a reducing technique to reduce excesses.

Again, be aware of the whole needle, especially the tip of it when you do this.

Flying needle

Use where there is a big muscle, as this is a strong stimulation. Spin it forward 180 degrees, then back about 90 degrees, then a hard roll to make the needle spin in the hole. Can also spin backwards the other direction. Kind of like spinning a top.

Trembling

1. wiggle or tremble
2. do tiny rotations of about 30 degrees with the *intent* of lifting and thrusting

Rotate and lift/thrust

Lift, thumb forward, roll up, roll down. You are simultaneously spinning and lifting/thrusting the needle.

These are the most common methods used for bringing the Qi sensation to the patient, but there are many more—some stronger, some milder. Once the Qi sensation is felt by the patient, stop manipulating unless you want to further strengthen the Qi sensation.

Retention

How long do you retain the needles in place? The average is 15-20 minutes, though some texts say 28 minutes. This varies, as there are different retentions for different applications. Leave them in less time for more sensitive patients. As a rule:

- Exterior and/or acute conditions: shorter duration
 - Exception: with acute pain, retain longer for longer lasting effects.
- Interior/chronic problems: longer duration
- Small children: insert, get sensation, withdraw
- Sensitive patients: short duration
 - Be aware of patient's condition, spirit, diseases (such as frequent need to urinate or diarrhea) and adjust accordingly.

During treatment check to see how Qi sensation is going. If not feeling, re-manipulate. This is not so common. Just be aware if they aren't feeling it, it's not doing as much good as it could.