



Unit 4: Fundamentals of Acupressure and Meridian Theory

Subject: Massage & Acupressure

Unit 4: Fundamentals of Acupressure and Meridian Theory

(Introduction & History • Yin-Yang • Five Elements • Organ Clock • Meridians: Concept & Definition • Key Meridians with Practical Points)

4.1 Introduction and Brief History of Acupressure

Acupressure is the therapeutic use of **finger, thumb, or blunt tool pressure** on specific body points to influence pain, circulation, and autonomic balance. It developed within **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)**, whose classical texts (e.g., *Huangdi Neijing*, ca. 2nd–1st century BCE) describe **channels (meridians)** through which **qi**—functional vitality—flows. Over centuries, manual pressure, needling (acupuncture), moxibustion, and tuina massage co-evolved. In contemporary integrative care, acupressure is used for **tension headaches, nausea, dyspepsia, anxiety, sleep problems, and musculoskeletal discomfort**, with an emphasis on **safety, hygiene, and scope of practice**. It is **adjunctive**, not a replacement for medical care.

4.2 Concepts of Yin and Yang

Yin (陰) and **Yang (陽)** are complementary, dynamic qualities that describe **relative** states:

Yin (substance, cool, restful)

Yang (activity, warm, moving)

Interior • Night • Fluids • Nourishment Exterior • Day • Heat • Function

Structure (organs, tissues)

Movement (circulation, nerve activity)

Clinical sense: Many patterns are framed as **excess/deficiency of Yin or Yang**.

- **Yin-deficient** person: warm hands/feet at night, dry mouth, light sleep → favor **calming points** and gentle pressure.
- **Yang-deficient** person: cold limbs, fatigue → favor **tonifying points** with steady, moderate pressure and warming oils.

Practice cue: In a single session, balance **settling (Yin)** and **activating (Yang)**—for example, finish with **calming head/foot points** after shoulder work.

4.3 Five Element Theory

The **Five Phases/Elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water**—describe functional relationships among organs, emotions, seasons, and environments.

4.3.1 Core correspondences (quick reference)

Element	Zang-Fu pair	Season	Emotion	Taste	Climate	Color
Wood	Liver-Gallbladder	Spring	Anger/Frustration	Sour	Wind	Green
Fire	Heart-Small Intestine (+ Pericardium-San Jiao)	Summer	Joy/Overexcitement	Bitter	Heat	Red
Earth	Spleen-Stomach	Late summer	Worry/Rumination	Sweet	Damp	Yellow



Element	Zang-Fu pair	Season	Emotion	Taste	Climate	Color
Metal	Lung–Large Intestine	Autumn	Grief	Pungent	Dryness	White
Water	Kidney–Bladder	Winter	Fear	Salty	Cold	Black/Blue

Cycles:

- **Generating (Shēng):** Wood → Fire → Earth → Metal → Water → Wood.
 - **Controlling (Kè):** Wood ☐ Earth; Earth ☐ Water; Water ☐ Fire; Fire ☐ Metal; Metal ☐ Wood.
- These guide **point selection**—e.g., tonify a mother element if a child is weak.

4.4 Organ Clock (Chinese Meridian Clock)

Each primary meridian has a **2-hour peak** when its function is said to be most active. Use it for **timing practices** and **self-care routines**.

Time (24h)	Meridian (Abbrev.)	Type
03–05	Lung (LU)	Yin
05–07	Large Intestine (LI)	Yang
07–09	Stomach (ST)	Yang
09–11	Spleen (SP)	Yin
11–13	Heart (HT)	Yin
13–15	Small Intestine (SI)	Yang
15–17	Bladder (BL/UB)	Yang
17–19	Kidney (KD)	Yin
19–21	Pericardium (PC)	Yin
21–23	San Jiao/Triple Burner (SJ/TB)	Yang
23–01	Gallbladder (GB)	Yang
01–03	Liver (LV)	Yin

Example: gentle **LU** work and breathing between **03–05** may feel clarifying; **ST–SP** points before lunch (**07–11**) support digestion.

4.5 Concept and Definition of Meridian

A **meridian (jing-luo)** is a mapped **functional pathway** connecting surface points to deeper organ systems. In practice, meridians help the clinician:

1. **Select points** that influence a region or function;
2. **Link symptoms** across distant areas (e.g., temporal headache ↔ Gallbladder channel);
3. **Sequence** treatments along a pathway for circulation and autonomic balance.

Modern reading: Meridians can be viewed as **neuro-myofascial highways**—pragmatic maps that align with **nerve distributions**, **fascial planes**, and **reflex responses** rather than discrete “tubes.”

Zang-Fu:

- **Yin (Zang) organs:** Lung, Spleen, Heart, Kidney, Pericardium, Liver.
- **Yang (Fu) organs:** Large Intestine, Stomach, Small Intestine, Bladder, San Jiao, Gallbladder.



Extraordinary vessels: Ren (CV) and Du (GV) regulate global Yin/Yang flows; frequently used in calming/centering work.

4.6 Key Meridians — paths, landmark points, and cautions

Point location system: use proportional **cun** (寸)—the client's own finger breadths. **1 cun** ≈ width of the interphalangeal joint of the thumb; **3 cun** ≈ width of four fingers together.

Dosing (general adult): press **30-60 s per point**, 1-3 rounds; depth **3-4/10** on a comfort scale; slow circular kneading or steady perpendicular pressure.

Pregnancy: avoid strong stimulation at **LI4, SP6, BL60, BL67, GB21, CV4-CV6**; keep abdominal/lumbosacral work gentle; when unsure, **omit**.

4.6.1 High-yield “starter” points (for acupressure)

Meridian	Point (Pinyin • Code)	How to find	Typical uses*	Safety
Large Intestine	Hégu • LI4	Dorsum hand, web between thumb-index; at the high point when pinching	Headache, face pain, stress	Avoid in pregnancy
Liver	Tàichōng • LV3	Dorsum foot, between 1st-2nd metatarsals, 1-2 cun proximal to web	Irritability, tension headache, PMS	Gentle if foot pain
Stomach	Zúsānlǐ • ST36	3 cun below ST35, one finger-breadth lateral to tibial crest	Energy, digestion, knee comfort	Avoid very acute injury
Spleen	Sānyīnjiāo • SP6	3 cun above medial malleolus, posterior to tibia	Sleep, digestion, pelvic circulation	Avoid in pregnancy
Pericardium	Nèiguān • PC6	2 cun above wrist crease, between PL & FCR tendons	Nausea, palpitations, anxiety	Usually safe; moderate depth
Lung	Lièquē • LU7	1.5 cun proximal to wrist crease, radial border	Cough, neck stiffness	Caution in skin fragility
Gallbladder	Fēngchí • GB20	Hollow below occiput, between SCM & trapezius	Neck tension, headache	Light pressure only
Bladder	Shènshù • BL23	1.5 cun lateral to L2 spinous process	Low-back support, fatigue	No pressure on spine itself
Conception Vessel	Qihǎi • CV6	Midline, ~1.5 cun below umbilicus	Vitality, gentle abdominal tone	Avoid deep work in pregnancy
Conception Vessel	Zhōngwǎn • CV12	Midline, ~4 cun above umbilicus	Upper GI comfort	Gentle only
Governor Vessel (Extra)	Bǎihuì • GV20	Vertex of head (ear tops line)	Calm mind, balance	Very light touch
	Yíntáng	Between eyebrows	Calm, sinus ease	Gentle only

*Uses reflect traditional indications and common integrative applications; they complement—not replace—medical care.

4.6.2 Twelve primary meridians at a glance

Pair	Yin/Yang	Abbrev.	General path (surface)	Element
Lung–Large Intestine	Yin–Yang	LU–LI	Chest → arm radial; hand dorsum → face	Metal
Stomach–Spleen	Yang–Yin	ST–SP	Face → front body → leg; medial foot/leg → abdomen → chest	Earth
Heart–Small Intestine	Yin–Yang	HT–SI	Axilla → ulnar forearm → palm; ulnar hand → scapula → face	Fire
Bladder–Kidney	Yang–Yin	BL–KD	Medial eye → head/back → posterior leg; sole → medial leg → abdomen/chest	Water
Pericardium–San Jiao	Yin–Yang	PC–SJ	Chest → palmar forearm → palm; dorsal wrist → lateral arm → ear	Fire



Pair	Yin/Yang Abbrev.	General path (surface)	Element
Gallbladder-Liver	Yang-Yin GB-LV	Lateral head/neck → side body → lateral leg; dorsum foot → medial leg → abdomen/chest	Wood

4.7 Practical Acupressure: method, sequence, and safety

Method (one point):

1. **Locate** with anatomy/cun; confirm with a mild “tender-but-good” sensation.
2. **Press/hold** to 3–4/10 depth; maintain **slow breath**; circular knead or steady hold **30–60 s**.
3. **Release slowly**; recheck comfort and warmth.

Sequencing:

- **General → local → general** (e.g., head-hand-head for headache).
- Combine **a distal point** (LI4, LV3) with **a local point** (GB20) for head/neck issues.
- End with **calming points** (Yintang, GV20, LV3).

Safety / when to avoid or modify

- Severe, undiagnosed pain; **fever/infection**; **DVT** suspicion; **active cancer treatment areas** without clearance; **bleeding disorders/anticoagulants** (very gentle); **neuropathy** (reduced sensation); **fractures/wounds**; **pregnancy** (see list).
- Keep nails short; clean hands/tools; communicate pressure (0–10 scale); **stop** for sharp, radiating, or worsening pain.

Documentation: record **points used, side, pressure style/dose, client response, cautions given**.

4.8 Clinical Mini-Protocols (applied anatomy + meridians)

Use as **teaching templates**; always individualize and stay within scope.

A) Stress, overthinking, exam anxiety

- **Sequence (8–10 min):** Yintang → PC6 (bilateral) → LI4 (bilateral, **omit if pregnant**) → LV3 (bilateral) → GV20 (light).
- **Breath:** 4–6 breaths/min, **longer exhale**.
- **Home practice:** press PC6 & LV3 nightly, 1–2 rounds.

B) Tension-type headache / neck-shoulder tightness

- **Sequence:** GB20 (light) → LI4 (omit if pregnant) → SJ5 (outer forearm, 2 cun above dorsal wrist crease) → LU7 → local gentle kneading upper trapezius → finish LV3.
- **Posture tip:** avoid sustained forward-head; micro-breaks.

C) Nausea (including motion sickness; pregnancy with caution)

- **Sequence:** PC6 (main) → CV12 (gentle) → ST36.
- **Note:** PC6 is widely used in pregnancy but keep pressure **gentle** and **avoid SP6/LI4**.

D) Indigestion/bloating (non-acute)

- **Sequence:** ST36 → CV12 (gentle) → SP6 (**not in pregnancy**) → LI4 (**omit in pregnancy**) → abdominal **clockwise**



stroking.

E) Trouble sleeping

- **Sequence (evening):** LV3 → SP6 (**omit in pregnancy**) → Yintang → GV20 (light).
- **Environment:** dim light, warm room; reduce screens.

F) Low-back discomfort (non-radicular, non-acute)

- **Sequence:** BL23 (bilateral, beside L2—**no direct spinal pressure**) → GV3 (between L4–L5, very light) → KD3 (between Achilles & medial malleolus) → finish with **abdominal breath coaching**.

Red flags (refer out): chest pain, acute neurological deficits, persistent vomiting, severe abdominal pain, trauma, progressive weakness/numbness, fever with severe headache.

Unit Summary

Acupressure rests on a **functional map** of the body: **Yin-Yang balance**, **Five Element** relationships, the **Organ Clock**, and **meridian pathways**. These models guide **point selection, timing, and sequencing**. In practice, use **measured, hygienic, and well-communicated pressure**, favoring **distal + local combinations** and ending with **calming points**. Safety—especially in **pregnancy, vascular/bleeding risks**, and **undifferentiated acute illness**—is non-negotiable. Thoughtfully integrated, acupressure can **ease pain, calm the nervous system, and support digestion, sleep, and breath**, complementing yoga and naturopathy.

Key Terms

- **Qi • Meridian (Jing-Luo) • Zang-Fu**
- **Yin-Yang** (relative, dynamic balance)
- **Five Elements** (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water; **Shēng/Kè** cycles)
- **Organ Clock** (2-hour meridian peaks)
- **Extraordinary Vessels (Ren/CV, Du/GV)**
- **Cun measurement • Tonify/Sedate (acupressure intent)**
- **Contraindications** (pregnancy points, DVT, infection)

Self-Assessment

A. MCQs

1. **Which pairing is correct** in Five Element correspondences?
a) Metal—Liver/Gallbladder
b) Earth—Lung/Large Intestine
c) **Water—Kidney/Bladder**
d) Fire—Liver/Gallbladder
2. The **peak time** for the **Lung** meridian on the Organ Clock is:
a) 01–03 b) **03–05** c) 05–07 d) 07–09
3. **LI4 (Hégu)** is commonly used for head/face issues. A key caution is:
a) Avoid in the elderly
b) **Avoid strong stimulation in pregnancy**
c) Avoid in men only



- d) Must be pressed >5 minutes to work
4. The point most associated with **nausea control** is:
a) LV3 b) **PC6** c) SP6 d) GB20
5. A safe **dosing guideline** for one point in adults is roughly:
a) 5-10 seconds, very hard pressure
b) **30-60 seconds, 3-4/10 depth, 1-3 rounds**
c) 3 minutes, 8-9/10 depth
d) Tapotement until redness

Answer key: 1-c, 2-b, 3-b, 4-b, 5-b

B. Short Answer

1. Explain **Yin-Yang** using two musculoskeletal examples (e.g., structure vs function; rest vs movement).
2. List **five** classical correspondences for the **Liver (Wood)** element.
3. Define **meridian** and describe how you **locate and dose** acupressure on **ST36**.
4. Draft a **5-point sequence** for **tension headache**, noting one contraindication.
5. Why are **LI4 and SP6** commonly avoided in pregnancy? Name **two alternative calming points**.

C. Reflective/Application

1. Keep a **3-day organ-clock diary**: note the time, your energy/digestion mood, and which **meridian-aligned point** you pressed. What patterns did you observe?
2. A participant with **neck tension and poor sleep** seeks help. Write a **6-8 line plan** (points, order, breath cues, safety notes).
3. How would you **explain acupressure** to a skeptical client using modern language (nerves, fascia, autonomic system) while respecting TCM models?

End of Unit 4: Fundamentals of Acupressure and Meridian Theory