

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 (Shéng):** 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	Qìhǎi • 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
	Yǐntáng	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

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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