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## LIFE HEALTH

# Don't fear acupuncture needles



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours  
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Acupuncture needles are much different than the needles most people fear. (FOTOLIA)

Fear is typically thought of as a negative emotion, something we want to avoid. Yet every year around Halloween many of us get a kick out of getting scared — dressing up as monsters, visiting haunted houses, and watching horror movies.

There are those for whom fears have become excessive. A phobia is an unreasonable or extreme fear that causes avoidance and panic. While there are many irrational phobias, such as the fear of clowns (coulrophobia), sitting (cathisophobia), or household appliances (oikophobia), other fears are easier to grasp, like a fear of heights, snakes, and enclosed spaces.

About 20% of the general population has some fear of needles. There are six types of needle phobias. Aichmophobia is an intense fear of sharp or pointed objects; algophobia is an abnormal fear of pain; belonephobia is a fear of sharp pointed objects, particularly needles; enetophobia is a fear of pins; trypanophobia is a fear of injections; and vaccinophobia is a fear of vaccinations. This fear is understandable, as people might be afraid of the anticipation of pain or recall a bad experience resulting from a needle.

Acupuncture involves the use of acupuncture needles, so many will avoid receiving this form of therapy, even though it may limit treatment options. One way to address a fear of acupuncture needles is to rationalize and learn the facts about the object of dread. The first thing to understand about acupuncture needles is that they are not the same as injection needles. Acupuncture needles do not involve drawing out or pushing in liquid. They are made of extremely thin, flexible, and durable surgical stainless steel, and 10-15 acupuncture needles can fit into an average hypodermic injection needle. As a result, acupuncture is not painful. Sensation can be varied — numbness, tingling, aching, heaviness, lightness, warmth, cold — but should not be sharp or painful.

The irony of a fear of acupuncture needles is that acupuncture itself may help treat phobias and reduce anxiety. Acupuncture stimulates the release of serotonin and endorphins, our bodies' own chemicals to help ease anxiety and pain. This is a good place to note that a common technique to treat phobias is called systematic desensitization. The method involves exposing the person to the dreaded object or situation under relaxed conditions until there is no more anxiety reaction. Thus, acupuncture is a suitable method for treating a phobia of needles.

If you want to celebrate Halloween by facing and conquering a fear, try acupuncture. No trick, all treat.

*Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.*

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## Poll

### Are you afraid of needles?

Friday, October 31, 2014

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

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