

Electro Acupuncture Handbook for Musculoskeletal Problems

by Stephen Lee

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The *Electro Acupuncture Handbook for Musculoskeletal Problems* by Stephen Lee is just what the title suggests - a hands-on, concise paperback clinical guide based on the author's 30 years' clinical experience of treating musculoskeletal conditions. In the book's opening paragraph the author declares his overarching aim: simply wanting to treat patients successfully. After studying at the College of Traditional Acupuncture in Leamington Spa in the early 1980s, he soon bought his first electroacupuncture (EA) machine and discovered it was even more effective than manual acupuncture (MA) for treating musculoskeletal problems. After a long process of developing and refining his clinical methods, he has now produced a remarkably clear book to share his discoveries with the acupuncture community.

The book delivers instruction on practical skills that any acupuncturist will be able to follow. Where previous attempts to popularise EA have been fairly academic, this book is a clinical handbook, full of engaging diagrams and easy-to-interpret clinical information. Working in a busy acupuncture clinic in central London, the majority of conditions (about 40 per cent) that I see are pain related. I had bought myself a new EA machine about a year ago, primarily to use for gynaecological conditions. The invitation to review this book for the *Journal of Chinese Medicine* came therefore timely, and over the last two months I have referred to it on a number of occasions whilst treating musculoskeletal problems, putting the author's techniques into clinical practice. On a number of occasions, the book has been literally in-hand as I referred to the diagrams and EA point configurations while treating regular patients' pain conditions. Feedback from three separate patients has been unanimously positive, with the patients reporting longer periods of symptom reduction and improvement in pain management.

The book is divided into 18 chapters with a separate introduction. In the introduction, the author distils his understanding of the nature of EA from the traditional Chinese medicine perspective - he sees it as essentially moving qi and blood stasis, and thereby relieving pain. The book is focused on pain relief and guides the practitioner to treat all kinds of musculoskeletal problems from this perspective. However, the author reflects that EA treatment is most effective when the underlying constitutional disharmonies of a person are also addressed, and advises the practitioner to include these practical EA treatments within a more traditional diagnostic framework for best practice and outcomes.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce and explore the concepts and principles of electricity in the body, both in terms of treatment and its role in animating physiology. A brief history of electricity in medicine is provided, leading on to the current theories and mechanisms underlying the effects of MA and EA; this is written in a well referenced and coherent style. Chapter 3 looks in detail at EA machines, while Chapter 4 looks at the method of attaching electrodes, and outlines precautions and contraindications in clinical practice. Chapter 5 sets out treatment principles for using EA, sharing practical insights about when and how to use it in combination with MA, and covers choice of points and technical considerations such as electrical frequency.

Chapters 6 to 18 make up the practical clinical guide and are organised according to particular areas/conditions: neck, shoulder, tennis and golfer's elbow, carpal tunnel syndrome, fingers and thumbs, lower back, hip, groin strain, knee, Achilles tendon, plantar fasciitis, scar tissue, as well as difficult and unusual cases. The presentation throughout these chapters is excellent and follows the same format in each condition, beginning with a concise overview of each problem including the aetiology and subsequent pathology. The relevant anatomy of the condition and the underlying structures that are associated with the problem are then clearly illustrated. Instruction is given regarding diagnostic palpation of muscles and assessment of range of movement. Therapeutic exercises are also suggested where appropriate, with clear illustrations and photographs, which give an authentic aliveness that I have not seen in other acupuncture texts. Finally, the treatment approach is given a clinical context by including a number of case studies, again accompanied by photographs and illustrations of the treatment. The point configurations for both EA and MA are clearly marked on the diagrams, and then discussed in detail in a precise stepped format. Finally, an indication of outcome and/or prognosis is given.

It is hard to criticise this excellent handbook that delivers clinically developed and tested treatments for the most commonly seen musculoskeletal conditions. It is accessible and easy to follow, and brings immediate results when put into clinical practice. In combination with *Close To the Bone* by David Legge, I feel my reference library in this area is up-to-date.

Jason Unwin
