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PRESS RELEASE: LOCAL INTERVIEWS AVAILABLE

YOUR FIRST ACUPUNCTURE APPOINTMENT: WHAT REALLY HAPPENS?

From tongue checks and pulse taking to questions about sleep and digestion, AACMA Director Lori-Ellen Grant explains what Australians can expect when visiting an acupuncturist for the first time.

- A first acupuncture appointment usually begins with a conversation about a person's health, medical history, lifestyle and reasons for seeking care.
- Tongue examination and pulse taking are traditional Chinese medicine assessment techniques that may form part of an initial consultation.
- Depending on individual needs, treatment may involve acupuncture, cupping, moxibustion (heat treatment) or other Chinese medicine techniques.

AUSTRALIA, NOVEMBER 2026: For Australians considering acupuncture for the first time, the thought of needles may be the first thing that comes to mind. But what happens during an appointment can involve considerably more than people might expect.

Why might an acupuncturist ask about your sleep when you've booked an appointment for something completely different? What are they looking for when they examine your tongue or take your pulse? And does every appointment involve needles?

According to Lori-Ellen Grant, Director of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association (AACMA), Australia's largest professional association representing registered acupuncturists and Chinese herbal medicine practitioners, understanding what happens during a consultation can help people feel more informed about their first visit.

“People are sometimes surprised by the questions we ask during their first appointment, particularly when we discuss things like sleep, digestion or general wellbeing. But these conversations help us understand the individual and what has brought them to see us, rather than focusing only on one symptom,” Ms Grant said.

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An initial acupuncture consultation generally begins with a discussion about the person's health concerns, medical history and lifestyle. Practitioners may ask about sleep, digestion, appetite and other aspects of general wellbeing, even when these do not appear directly related to the reason for the appointment.

These questions form part of a traditional Chinese medicine assessment, which considers different aspects of a person's health when developing an individual approach to care.

Practitioners may also use traditional assessment techniques, including examining the tongue and taking the pulse at both wrists, to help guide their assessment and treatment decisions.

While acupuncture is perhaps the most recognisable Chinese medicine technique, it is not necessarily the only treatment a practitioner may discuss.

“Acupuncture is probably the technique most people recognise, but depending on the individual, treatment may also involve cupping, moxibustion, which is a form of heat treatment, or other Chinese medicine techniques,” Ms Grant said. “We explain what each treatment involves and why it may be considered, so patients understand what to expect.”

Chinese herbal medicine may also be discussed where appropriate with a practitioner registered in Chinese herbal medicine, taking into consideration the person's medical history and any medications they are currently using.

Ms Grant said treatment approaches can differ depending on the individual, their health concerns and the practitioner's assessment, making communication an important part of the consultation.

For Australians who may feel uncertain about booking their first appointment, she encouraged people to ask questions and discuss any concerns with their practitioner.

“You don't need to know anything about Chinese medicine before your first appointment. Come prepared to talk about your health, ask questions and let your practitioner know if there's anything you're unsure about. The consultation is an opportunity to understand your options and feel comfortable with the care being discussed,” Ms Grant said.

Australians considering acupuncture are encouraged to choose a qualified and registered practitioner and discuss their individual health needs before commencing treatment.

To find an AACMA member near you, visit AACMA's Find a Practitioner directory.

More information VISIT www.acupuncture.org.au.

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