

# Health & Fitness

## Your Health

### Pomegranate power

"Pomegranates are a good produce choice for December," says Marisa Moore, a registered dietitian in Atlanta and spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. "They're in peak season, and you can store them in the fridge for up to two months."

The Washington Post says the fruit's vibrant red seed sacs, which hold a hard kernel surrounded



by juice, offer a bit of vitamin C and potassium, Moore says, and a half-cup serving provides a healthy 3.5 grams of fiber. Thanks to the antioxidants they contain, pomegranates may help fight some cancers and possibly slow the growth of prostate cancer, Moore notes. Pomegranate juice is tasty, but not as good a choice as the seeds, Moore says. "Half a cup of juice has (about) 70 calories, just like half a cup of seeds," she says. "But most people drink more than half a cup, and 8 ounces adds up to (about) 135 calories."

### Watch the drinking

Gary Rogg, assistant professor of internal medicine at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, has an interesting take on alcohol, according to The Washington Post.

"Alcohol is calories," he says. "Fuel for the engine, if you will." Accompanying your drinks with food and "drinking adequate amounts of water will naturally cut your desire to drink" by curbing your need for the carbs that drinking supplies. Hydrating ahead of time also can set you up for imbibing less through the evening, Rogg suggests.

He also reminds us that "the American Heart Association says up to two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women is OK," he says. And he warns that this doesn't mean it's OK to quaff eight drinks at a time on the weekend.

### Enter Fittest Loser

Are you looking for a health and fitness makeover? We'd like to give you a shot at making it happen. The Daily Herald and Niche Publications are offering the Fittest Loser Challenge along with sponsors including Push Fitness in Schaumburg.

We are seeking five motivated people to see who can lose the most weight in a 12-week period beginning Jan. 30. Each participant will receive free instruction from a personal trainer and nutritionist to train three to four days a week in Schaumburg.

Contestants will be featured in before- and after-photos and in stories highlighting their progress. Results will be measured each week. The Fittest Loser will be chosen based on percentage of weight lost.

To apply, go to [www.pushfitnesstraining.com/signup.php](http://www.pushfitnesstraining.com/signup.php). Applications will be accepted through Friday, Jan. 6.

## Diet wagering gains as a weight-loss incentive

BY LEANNE ITALIE  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Neil Ylanan eats for a living and travels constantly as a food expert for a company that supplies in-flight meals to airlines. Toss in those sleepless, sluggish early years of fatherhood — he's got three young kids — and he was dealing with significant weight gain.

Looking around his office in Irving, Texas, the 37-year-old Ylanan realized he wasn't alone, so he rallied four of his fellow foodies at LSG Sky Chefs for a weight-loss competition online.

They named their team "All About the Benjamins," in homage to the \$10,000 top prize offered by HealthyWage.com, one of at least a dozen diet betting sites to emerge after "The Biggest Loser" went on the air and the nation's obesity epidemic grew worse.

Each of the Benjamins anted up \$60 to lose more — up to a safe weekly maximum — than 30 or so teams from the same company and around the map. They had three months. Victory was theirs in October.

"At first we really were all about the Benjamins, but the impetus kind of changed. You didn't want to let your

teammates down," said Ylanan, who at 5-foot-7 began the competition at 245 pounds and ended it at 196.

"I joined a gym. We've all picked up racquetball," he said. "I haven't played racquetball in 15 years."

Research on whether financial incentives lead to weight loss is inconclusive, but that hasn't kept thousands of people off diet betting sites since they began sprouting in 2004. Many of the sites experience dramatic hikes in traffic during the danger stretch between Thanksgiving and January.

"We think of New Year's as our Black Friday," said Victoria Fener, director of

operations for Sticck.com.

Each site has its own rules and tools, like line graphs to track progress, regular emails with tips and support, and rankings to keep an eye on the competition. Sticck allows users to set their own stakes, including an "anti-charity" donation to a hated cause. The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Americans United for Life are top recipients.

Most of the sites are free or require a small fee. Many make money betting optional to tackle weight loss and other health goals.

Regular weigh-ins are usually

# Sticking to it



Dr. Yu Zhu uses needles during an acupuncture session on a patient in her office at First Health Associates in Arlington Heights.

MARK WELSH/mwclsh@dailyherald.com

## Plagued by chronic knee pain, editor finds out there really is a point to acupuncture

BY TERESA SCHMEDDING  
tschmedding@dailyherald.com

I hate, hate, hate needles. I can hardly think of anything I hate more. I can't sleep a week before the free flu shot at work. I faint at the sight of them. They terrify me.

So why am I going to an acupuncturist?

It appears there's one thing I love more than I hate needles: running.

I'm no marathoner, but I was a solid 30-miles-or-so-a-week runner who loved to do some 5 and 10Ks. Then I hurt my hip. Then I hurt my knee. Then I tore my meniscus and had knee surgery. Eight months after surgery, a couple of fluid drainings, a cortisone shot and hundreds of dollars and hours on physical therapy, my knee still bothered me so much that I found it difficult to

sleep through the night. Then I dropped an air-conditioner unit on it and bruised the bone.

In the end, my ortho and physical therapist both told me to take up biking. And, in case you're wondering, I grew up playing sports and learned to "shake it off" and power through the pain, so I typically avoid doctors and drugs as much as possible. I'm also a bit pig-headed, so I started popping Aleve and kept running.

It also might be worth mentioning that running has always been my main way of relieving stress. If I can shut out the world and just pound the pavement, I can handle anything. The knee trouble started just as the economy tanked and my stress levels were through the roof. I started experiencing tinnitus (ringing in my ears) and having massive bouts of insomnia. I pretty much felt exhausted

all the time.

Now back to acupuncture ...

A friend of mine who's a bit more open-minded than I am about alternative medicine told me to quit whining about how much my knee hurts and go to an acupuncturist. I thought she was nuts, but agreed to do it because even my fellow running friends were starting to give me that "you're crazy" look.

So eight months ago, I contacted Dr. Yu Zhu at First Health Associates in Arlington Heights. As a critical and stubborn journalist, I had low expectations.

During the initial exam, Zhu looked at my tongue, sniffed around and felt



Teresa Schmedding

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## Acupuncture tries to stimulate healing within

BY TERESA SCHMEDDING  
tschmedding@dailyherald.com

Acupuncture is one component of Traditional Chinese Medicine that dates back more than 5,000 years.

An acupuncturist inserts thin metal needles through the skin, which stimulates healing by increasing blood and oxygen flow to the targeted area. Needles range from a half-inch long used in the head area to 5 inches for more fleshy parts of the body.

### TCM basics

Traditional Chinese Medicine is

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# Needles: Sticking with acupuncture pays off

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my pulse points all while I gave her my litany of knee ailments. I told her my sole mission was to get running again — and she should know I would probably write about this (the cynic in me firmly believed this was all a scam). Zhu said no problem and then started digging her fingers into my knee, feeling around the joint, checking range of motion and how my kneecap moves.

She then stared me directly in the eye and asked me how long had I been feeling so sluggish? How long had I not been sleeping? Why was my stress level so high? And why did I think I had to be so tough to not slow down and take care of myself?

I admit, I was a little freaked out because I hadn't mentioned any of those things to her. I just wanted my knee fixed.

I quickly learned that you don't go to a doctor like Zhu and get treated for one piece of your body. It's all

interconnected. She examines you on several levels and pays close attention to the "communication" between different parts of the body.

The joint and bone are related to the kidney, the soft tissue is related to the liver and muscle is related to the spleen. When those organs aren't functioning well it weakens the mechanics of the others. High stress can weaken the spleen and cause the liver to over-function. So in my case, it's kind of a chicken-egg issue: My stress level and knee pain were all mixed up together.

Zhu immediately targeted my bone bruise and knee joint with needles, plus various parts of my body and head to alleviate stress. She gave me some herbal supplements designed to help reset my metabolism. I saw her once a week for a couple of months, then every couple of weeks and now once a month or so.

Now for the two most important things: pain and results.

Does it hurt? Yes. After all, someone is sticking needles

into your body, but it doesn't hurt as much as I thought (less than a shot unless she puts a needle in a bony part like my ankle). In all honesty, the minute she puts a needle between my eyes, turns on music and lowers the lights, I immediately fall into the deepest, most relaxing sleep. It's like being at a spa.

The results: Within a couple of weeks, the bone bruise pain was gone. Within a month, most of the knee pain disappeared. The bonuses: I sleep. For the first time in years, I actually fall asleep and don't wake up until the next morning. And I don't wake up completely exhausted. The tinnitus is almost gone. I've dropped a few pounds. And I was able to get a flu shot this year without lying down so I wouldn't faint.

Today, eight months later, my knee is 99 percent pain-free (it hurts only when I twist it, run on hard pavement for more than three miles or wear pretty but stupid shoes). For me, the acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine healed what I didn't even know was broken.

I'm no acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine expert. My eyes tend to cross (or roll) when there's talk of ying-yang, meridians and chi. I don't know why acupuncture works so well on others and why it does nothing for some. Maybe it's the individual; maybe it's the doctor.

What I do know is that Zhu looks and listens to not just what I say, but how I say it and how I move. She doesn't take notes during our sessions.



MARK WELSH/mwels@dailyherald.com

**Dr. Yu Zhu, uses needles to work on the back of one of her patients in her office at First Health Associates in Arlington Heights.**

She looks me directly in the eye. She makes sure I understand what she's saying and what she's doing (which can't be easy since I still close my eyes when she picks up the needles).

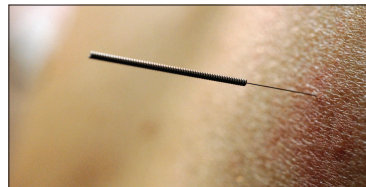
And I know that I feel like myself again. My energy is back, I can focus at work and I don't feel like the world is going to end tomorrow.

Most importantly, I learned

it's stupid to try to tough everything out. Zhu told me once that there aren't any bonus points after you die for living a life in pain. "If it hurts, come in and we'll fix it," she says.

Maybe this Traditional Chinese Medicine stuff isn't so complicated after all.

• Teresa Schmedding is assistant managing editor of content systems.



MARK WELSH/mwels@dailyherald.com

**You'd think acupuncture would be torture for someone who's afraid of needles (and pain), but it hurts less than a shot.**

## Acupuncture: Knowing the basics

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used to treat a variety of ailments, including vertigo, migraines, infertility, joint pain, depression, obesity and depression.

TCM is different from Western medicine in that practitioners are focused on helping the body heal itself. TCM teaches that emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health are all interconnected and good health is an ongoing process of maintaining balance and harmony on all levels. A person's life force, called chi, circulates through the body along meridians.

There are 12 main meridians in the body: lung, large intestine, small intestine, stomach, spleen, heart, bladder, gallbladder, liver, kidney, pericardium and triple warmer (which divides the body into upper, middle and lower parts).

For example, the liver

meridian, starts in the mid-section and runs down to your toes. Its main job is to keep energy to the body regulated so an acupuncturist might target this line if you're feeling sluggish.

As part of their evaluation, TCM practitioners examine the tongue and check the pulse along the meridians, in addition to smelling, touching and interviewing patients. Rather than prescribing a medicine to fix a problem, TCM tries to get the body to function as originally designed and heal itself.

Other aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine include herbal remedies, cupping and massage that also increase the flow of blood and oxygen to the targeted area. In cupping, a heated cup is applied to the skin to create a slight suction, stimulating blood and oxygen flow to the area, much like acupuncture.

### Regulation

Acupuncture is considered safe and effective if practiced correctly so you should find a licensed practitioner. The FDA estimates there are between 9 million and 12 million patients being treated with acupuncture.

The FDA regulates TCM herbal remedies as dietary supplements, which are not held to the same stringent standards as prescription medicines. It is important to obtain herbal remedies under the direction of a TCM practitioner.

• Illinois requires acupuncturists to be licensed by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation.

• On a federal level, the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine offers separate certification programs in acupuncture, Chinese

### Dr. Yu Zhu bio

Dr. Yu Zhu has more than 24 years of medical experience and is the head of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Department at First Health Associates in Arlington Heights.

She received her medical degree from Gansu College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, where she later taught for 13 years. She completed post-doctorate work at Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacology. She also taught at Shaara Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem.

Zhu has also co-authored five books on Traditional Chinese Medicine.

**Education:** M.S. Traditional Chinese Medicine, 1986; Shanghai University of Chinese Medicine & Pharmacology, Shanghai, China; medical degree, Traditional Chinese Medicine, 1983, Gansu College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Gansu, China

**Board certifications:** Illinois licensed acupuncturist, 2006; North Carolina licensed acupuncturist, 2004; certified Chinese herbology, 2003; and licensed physician

**Other affiliations:** Faculty member, National University of Health Science

**Contact info:** First Health Associates, 2010 S. Arlington Heights Road, Suite 42, Arlington Heights, Ill. (847) 593-3330, [http://firsthealthassociates.com/custom\\_content/c\\_115226\\_yu\\_zhu\\_lac\\_omd.html](http://firsthealthassociates.com/custom_content/c_115226_yu_zhu_lac_omd.html)

herbology and Oriental body- Oriental Medicine accredits work. The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and schools that teach acupuncture and TCM.