

## Functions of the Meridians

- Transport Qi and Xue
- Regulate Yin and Yang
- Resist Pathogens/Reflect Signs and Symptoms
- Transmit de qi
- Harmonize xu & shi

*All consists of Yin and Yang, the two principles in nature.  
When the proportion of Yang is known, Yin is revealed.  
When the proportion of Yin is known, Yang is revealed.  
The climates of Yin and Yang alternate and their accumulated climates  
act as one complete unit.  
The internal spirit and the external physical shape perfect each other.*

– Su Wen

The acupuncture meridians form the energetic anatomy of the body. TCM views the individual as an energetic entity connected to the greater energetic whole and their environment. The structure that constitutes a person is made up of pathways or meridians containing flowing qi, continually being created and recreated by the motion of yin to yang . Thus is a human being a conduit between the yang qi of heaven and the yin qi of earth.

*Man is that which makes a triad with heaven and earth and has resonances with yin and yang. The five viscera, the six bowels [of man], the twelve channels and river waters [of earth], externally have their headwaters, and internally have that by which they manifest themselves, for all internally and externally are together, like a circle without end.*

– Su Wen

The meridians consist of different forms of pathways. These differing structures and functions were developed through the long history of TCM study beginning in 150 BC (early Han Dynasty), experimentation and almost compulsive medical research and documentation. This body of work first came together as a cohesive system with the writing of the Nie Jing Ling Shu. The authors of the Ling Shu attempted for the first time in written form to bring together their knowledge of meridian theory and anatomy in a single system. As with all TCM texts, the sometimes seemingly contradictory explanations of connection and flow appear together, and are rectified as a cohesive, mutually accepted theory.

*It is said that in former times ancient sages discoursed on the human body and that they enumerated separately each of the viscera and each of the bowels. They talked about the origin of the blood vessels and about the vascular system, and said that where the blood vessels and the arteries (veins) meet there are six junctions. Following the course of each of the arteries there are the (365) vital points for acupuncture.*

– Ling Shu

As a whole, the meridians function to transport qi and blood to the body's tissues. Since blood nourishes, builds and repairs tissue, qi and blood supply enables growth and maintenance of the body. Qi is that which animates. Life manifests itself as movement. Thus, all movement, gross, kinetic and internal (visceral, neurological, physiological, etc) is a function and byproduct of the qi as it is transported, along with the blood, through the meridian system.

*Yin stores up the essence and prepares it to be used. Yang serves as protector against external danger and must therefore be strong. If Yin is not equal to Yang, then the pulse becomes weak and sickly. If Yang is not equal to Yin, then the breaths that are contained within the five viscera will conflict each other and the circulation ceases within the nine orifices. For this reason the sages caused Yin and Yang to be in harmony.*

– Su Wen

The regulation or balance of Yin and Yang is the basic principle of universal activity. The meridian system is divided into further divisions of yin and yang energies. The even movement back and forth between yin and yang is the fundamental constant of nature. This motion finds expression within the human body through the even flow of qi throughout the meridian system. This continual flow maintains the body's yin and yang balance and life.

*Thus a disease of the element of Yang ascends until it reaches the utmost height and then it descends; while a disease of the element of Yin descends to the lowest point and then ascends.*

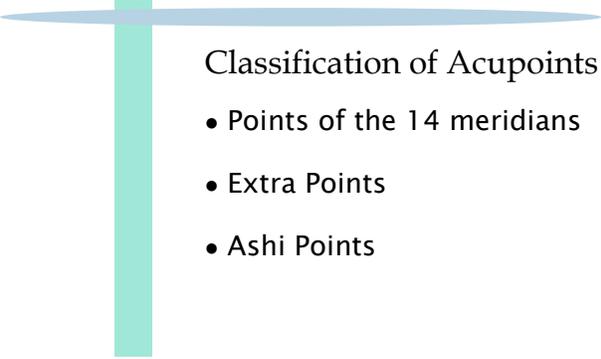
– Su Wen

Evidence of finding balance through being in motion is found in all aspects of daily life. Moving from spring to fall gives us growth cycles, from sleep to awake nurtures dreams, from conservatism to liberalism augurs democracy, from dissonance to consonance creates music. Perhaps the goal is not to quell sickness, but to be sick successfully, moving smoothly from the state of disease imbalance to the state of regained good health, enabling the body to engage its disease fighting mechanisms and produce its life sustaining viral antibodies.

The last principle of resisting pathogens, reflecting signs and symptoms and conducting de qi (needle sensation) to balance excess and deficiency, reflects a sophisticated understanding of “body intelligence” , whereby the body instinctively has desire and knowledge of how to cure its own states of imbalance. In this sense, not only do the meridians provide anatomical structure and enable physiological function but also serve as first defense against the noxious energies of the environment. They alert us to the location and nature of disease through visual, sensory, and palpatory clues and finally, through the auspices of acupuncture, provide sites for treatment and regained good health.

*Since these methods are those of Heaven, the Earth follows and adjusts its action.  
Those who are in harmony are like an echo;  
those who are in accord with these methods are like shadows;  
they follow Tao [their way], and need neither demons nor gods,  
for they are free and independent.*

*– Ling Shu*



## Classification of Acupoints

- Points of the 14 meridians
- Extra Points
- Ashi Points

## Classification of acupoints

Acupoints (qi xue meaning literally qi holes) are locations along the meridian flow where the qi is mutable (in states of transformation) and accessible for stimulation. They rest on the exterior portions of the meridian and thus impart emphasis to those portions of flow.

The points are complex entities being classified by scholars over the millennia into differing categories and being endowed with differing energetic functions derived from clinical experience.

The basic types of acupoints are as follows:

### Points of the fourteen meridians

The 12 main meridians contain the bulk of the points with definite locations. Each point of a meridian has function associated with its meridian, its paired meridian and local anatomy and differs from other points on the meridian according to position and classical category.

The Ren and Du Mai are unique among the Eight Extraordinary vessels in that they contain points specific to themselves unlike the other six Qai Mai, thus earning themselves the designation of the 13th and 14th meridian. They also contain points from the 12 main meridians that were most likely evolved from "spiritual gates" passed in Taoist meditative practice (not entirely dissimilar to the concept of chakras in yoga). The Ren Mai contains 6 out of the 12 mu-alarm points. Points on the spinal portion of the Du Mai share function with Shu-associated points at the same vertebral level.

### Extra points

Over years of clinical practice, physicians have found points not described in the Ling Shu's discourse on meridians that provided clinical value proven through empirical practice. These are termed the extra points. Acupuncture research continues today on the establishment of new "Extra Points."

Microsystem points can be considered part of this category.

### Ashi points

*Where you press and it is tender this is also a point.*

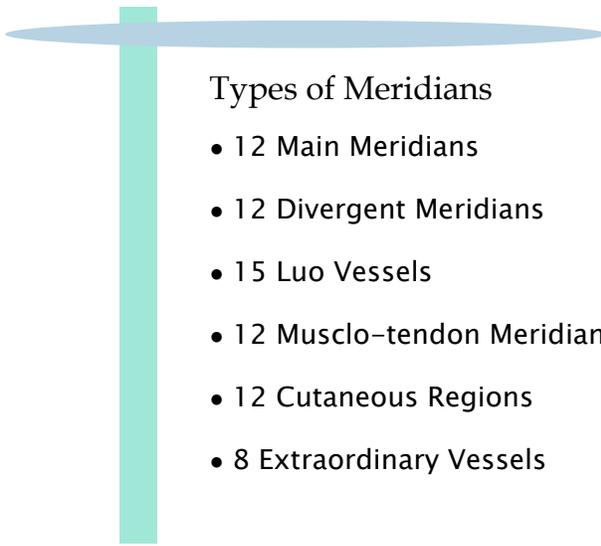
– Su Wen

*Use the acupuncture points which are painful.*

– Ling Shu

Treating tender points relates to the concept of "Body Intelligence" wherein the qi of the body is telling us where to treat.

An area of fruitful research might be to compare and contrast Ashi and trigger point location and usage.



## Types of Meridians

- 12 Main Meridians
- 12 Divergent Meridians
- 15 Luo Vessels
- 12 Musculo-tendon Meridians
- 12 Cutaneous Regions
- 8 Extraordinary Vessels

The differing types of meridians were perceived by sages and scholars at different times in the development of TCM. They have evolved into a system of differing and overlapping functions, and connections that serve the needs outlined in the previous pages. We know, for example, that references to Luo vessels and the Eight Extraordinary vessels predate knowledge of the 12 main meridians. Our current understanding of these structures as a complex whole comes directly from the Ling Shu with corollary explanation in the Nan Jing. Both the Ling Shu and the Nan Jing determine the roles of these different vessel centering on the 12 main meridians (jing-luo).

*Of all the principles of acupuncture the major channels make the beginning, they make the body's limits and quantities internally. They follow the 5 viscera externally. They are divided among the 6 bowels.*

– Ling Shu

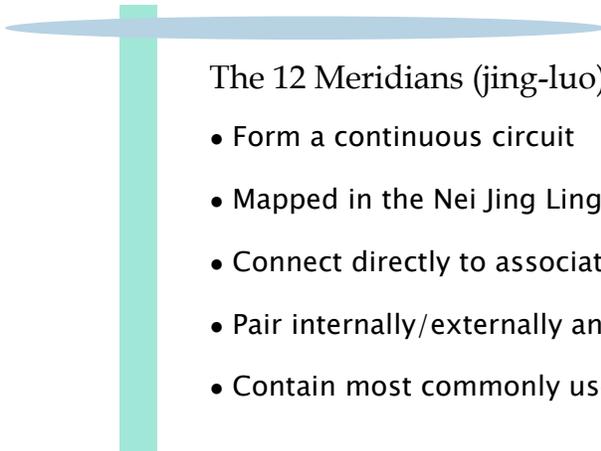
Each of the different meridian structures has unique history and function. The 12 main meridian receive most attention in modern TCM practice in part because they contain the majority of the defined points and also due to the emphasis placed on them in the Ling Shu. Modern TCM stresses the diagnosis and treatment of Zang-Fu disease patterns. The 12 jing-luo connect and associate directly to the zang and fu organs.

The divergent meridians are regarded in modern texts as offshoots of the main meridians. As they do not directly contain points, they are given less attention.

The 15 Luo vessels are perhaps the oldest “acupuncture” vessels. They comprise a complex structure that is referenced in both the Ling Shu and Nan Jing. Despite their importance, modern TCM rarely discusses their use. This might be due to differing opinions of their structure and uses. Interestingly, it should be noted that the Luo connecting points on the main meridians could be considered the most used point category in modern TCM practice.

The muscle tendon and cutaneous zones also receive reference and discussion in the Ling Shu. Modern meridian styles of acupuncture (both Japanese and French-Vietnamese) find clinical use of them in the treatment of pain disorders.

The Eight Extraordinary vessels referenced in both books of the Nie Jing may well be the oldest energetic system in the body. Only two of the vessels contain points and no texts attempt to reconcile their unusual flow patterns. Although it could be a stretch to classify them as acupuncture channels, their inclusion into the meridian system as discussed in the Ling Shu makes their addition necessary.



## The 12 Meridians (jing-luo)

- Form a continuous circuit
- Mapped in the Nei Jing Ling Shu
- Connect directly to associated Zang Fu
- Pair internally/externally and upper/lower
- Contain most commonly used acupoints

The current definition of the twelve main meridians (qi, xue, jing-luo) and their courses owes itself to chapter 10 of the Ling Shu. Other chapters provide measurements, details and associations with nature.

Prior to the Ling Shu, other classics defined portions of the system. The Eleven Channel Moxabustion Channel classic omits the pericardium channel and does not define acupuncture points as presently used. Pirog attributes this discrepancy to the idea of ten stems and twelve branches of Chinese astrology, the upper body relating to heaven and the lower body to earth. By the time of the Nan Jing, the question of eleven or twelve meridians still existed.

Clause 24 of the Nan Jing describes this discrepancy:

*“There are 12 channels; there are 5 zang and 6 fu. This makes eleven. What is the extra channel? One channel, the hand shaoyin, is divided. The pericardium and the san jiao make an exterior interior pair. Both have name and no form. Therefore we speak of 12 channels.”*

What is unique about the system as defined in the Ling Shu, and accepted to this day, is the idea of a continuous circuit. Prior systems, such as the lu network vessels, may have served to connect body structures but do not define how. The system in the Ling Shu describes a channel flow that moves up and down, in and out, in a systematic pattern. This flow pattern defies simple logic yet presents us with an artistic beauty and practical therapeutic use.

Since the twelve main meridians connect with their associated and paired zang-fu and often other organs, their pathological indications include dysfunctions of the zang fu and diseases that manifest along the course of the meridian.

Because the twelve meridians connect to each other and to their associated zang fu organs and contain points with specific energetic characteristics, they provide us the opportunity to adjust the movement of correct and pathogenic qi and to restore the body to a harmonious circulation flow. This is the meridian definition of optimal health.

The following descriptions of pathological manifestations of the 12 main meridians contain major distal points for treatment selected from modern texts . This point selection should in no way be considered the only or even best points to be used in all conditions; it is merely a starting location for treatment.

## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Lung jing–luo of hand tai yin

Cough, asthma, chest congestion,  
clavicle and arm pain

Use distal points LU7, LU9



The lung governs respiration and controls the wei (defense) qi. Diseases that involve respiratory symptoms are always associated with the lung. Weakness of the immune system is also associated with lung deficiency.

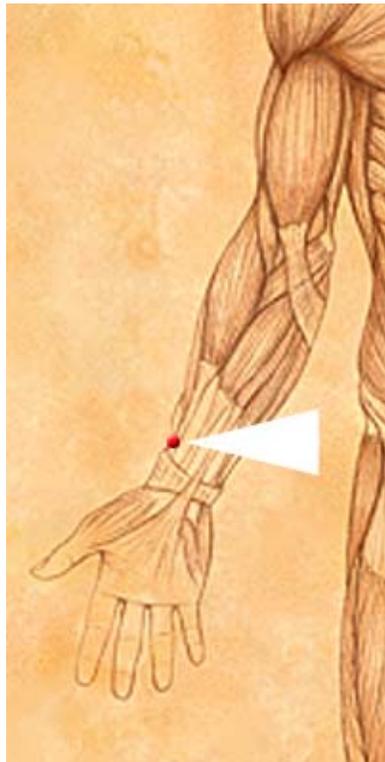
The lung meridian emerges from the pectoral region and governs the radial aspect of the arm and palm. Dysfunctions related to the thumb and radial flexion can be treated through the Lung meridian.

### Points

LU7 is the Luo point of hand tai yin and the confluent point of the Ren Mai. As such, it is indicated for the dispersing function of the lungs and treats excesses in the meridian and associated organ, as well as tonifying yin.

LU9 is the yuan source point and 5 element tonification point of the lung. It strengthens lung qi (wei qi) and resets the primary functions of the organ.

Both points serve as powerful local points for the radial aspect of the wrist.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Large Intestine of hand yang ming

Nasal discharge/congestion, neck/shoulder pain,  
arm/wrist pain, dysentery, diarrhea

Use distal points LI4, LI11



The Large Intestine transports waste downward from the stomach and governs defecation. Dysentery and diarrhea are LI dysfunctions.

The Su Wen says that the metal element of the lung opens to the nose. It does so by following the course of the LI meridian. Nasal discharge and congestion can be treated from the LI and LU meridians.

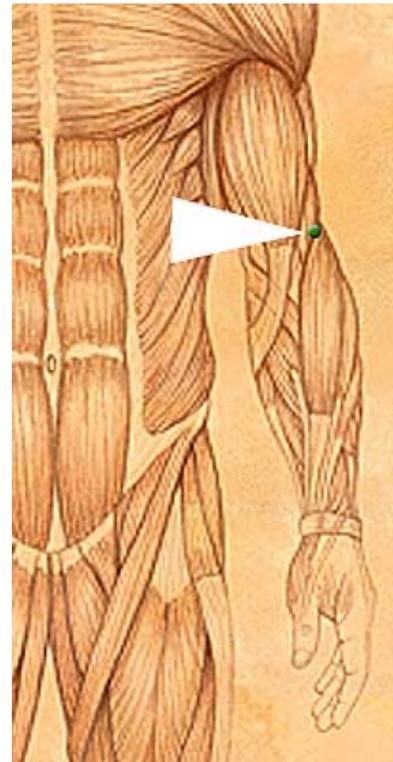
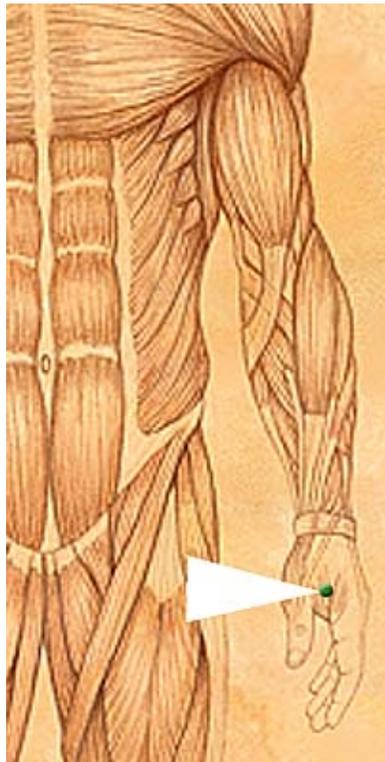
The LI meridian passes from the index finger along the ulnar aspect of the arm and upwards across the anterior shoulder and SCM. Disorders of the brachial radialis, acromion and anterior neck and face can be treated through the LI meridian.

### Points

LI4 is the yuan source point of the LI meridian of the hand yang ming and the upper gate of the 4 gates. As such, it functions to strongly invigorate qi, clear heat and normalize peristalsis.

LI4 is one of, if not the most, powerful local points of the hand. Its needling sensation spreads throughout the hand.

LI11 is the He-sea point of the large intestine and as such connects strongly to its associated organ. It has the function of clearing heat and damp from the whole body and especially the lower jiao. It also serves as a strong local point for the lateral aspect of the elbow.

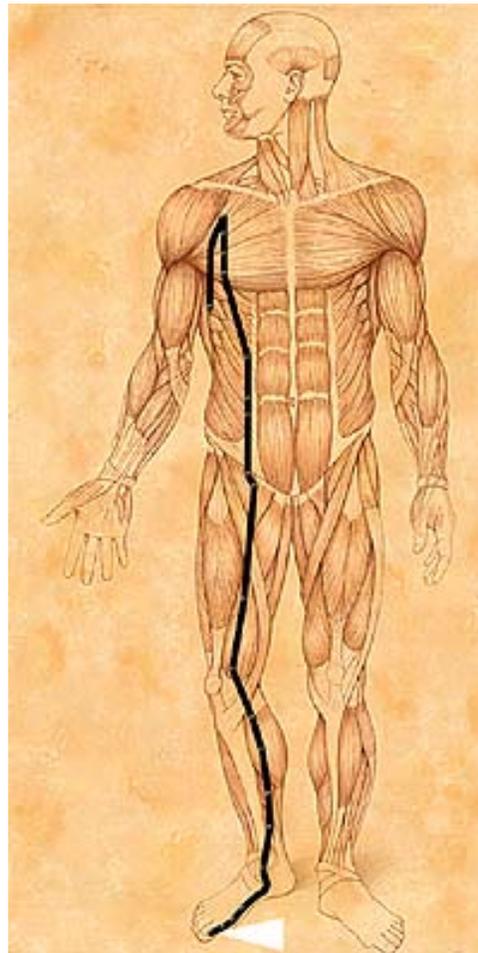


## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Spleen meridian of foot tai yin

Belching, vomit, reflux, abdominal bloating,  
heavy limbs, knee pain

Use distal points SP6, SP9



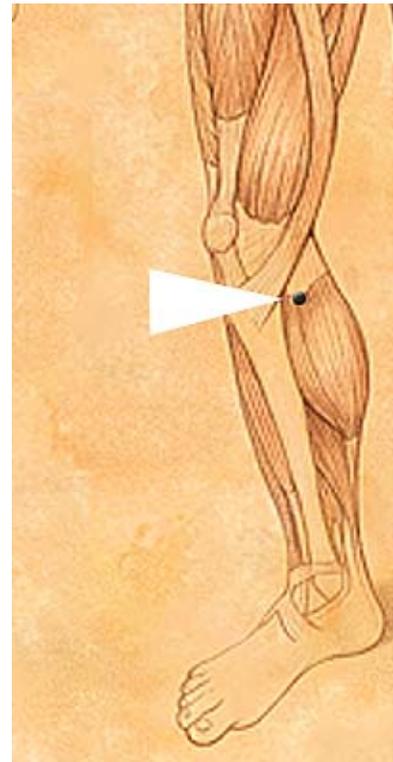
The spleen and stomach work together in the transformation and transportation of food and waste that fuels the production of qi. Belching, vomiting and reflux are signs of counterflow qi due to the imbalance of the spleen's upbearing and stomach's downbearing functions.

Loss of appetite and fatigue are signs of weakness in the production of qi. Fluids are transformed by the spleen and their abnormal build up causes heaviness of the limbs.

Both the spleen and stomach meridian pass through the leg and knee on opposite sides.

SP6 is the crossing (group luo) point for the 3 yin meridians and is considered a top point for the treatment of yin deficiency as well as stimulation of the spleen in the production of qi.

SP9 is the he-sea point of the foot tai yin meridian and the water point. It is one of the best points for draining damp in the body and tonifies the spleen. It is a powerful local point for the knee.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Stomach meridian of foot yang ming

Borborygmus, abdominal bloating, vomit,  
loss of appetite, deviation of mouth,  
sore throat, knee/leg pain

Use distal points ST36, ST40, ST44

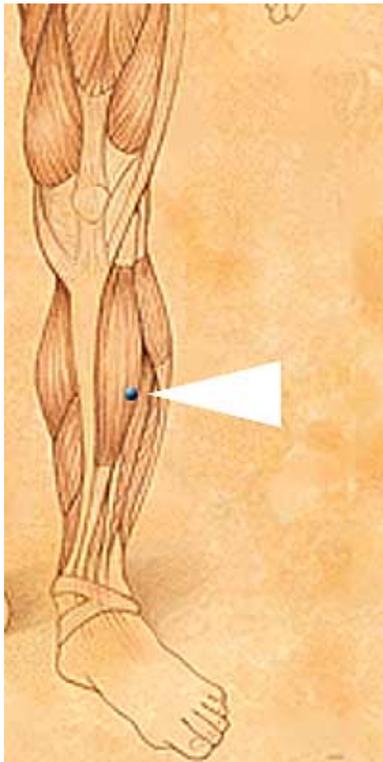


The stomach meridian crosses the through the jaw and anterior-lateral portion of the face.

ST36 is the He-Sea point of the stomach meridian and is the earth point on the earth meridian. It is very powerful point to be used in tonifying qi and normalizing parastalsis. A branch of the divergent meridian of the stomach separates at ST36 and connects to the spleen meridian. ST36 serves to harmonize the stomach and the spleen and strengthen the leg.

ST40 is the luo point of foot yang ming and is a good point for treating phlegm.

ST44 is the ying spring and water point of the stomach and clears heat from the yang ming bowels.

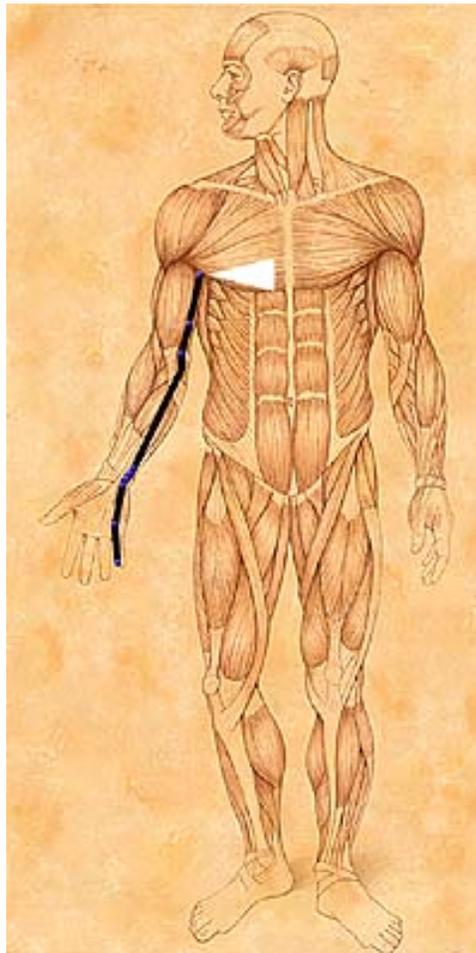


## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Heart meridian of the hand shao yin

Palpitations, chest pain, insomnia, dry throat,  
night sweats, ulnar aspect arm pain

Use distal point HT7

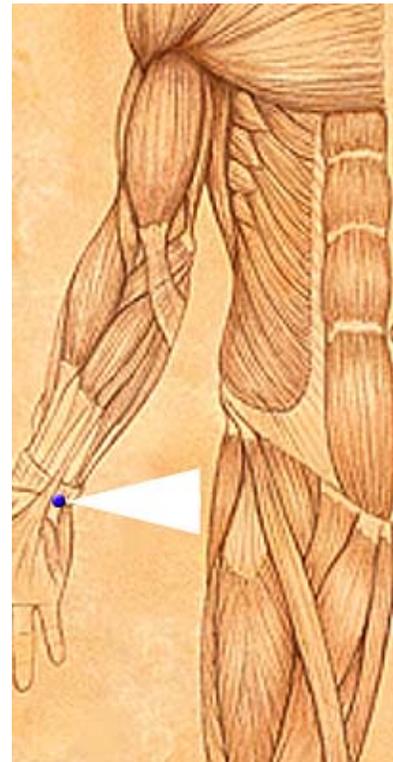


The heart beats to pump the blood and rules the chest. Palpitations are a sign of heart pathology. Stasis of heart blood and qi can cause chest pain.

The heart houses the shen and when the heart is unstable the shen cannot come to rest and sleep at night. The heart is a yin organ in a yang location (upper jiao). Thus, overwork, lack of sleep and overindulgence in sex can deplete the yin water of the kidney causing water to fail in regulating fire of the heart. This, in turn, can cause night sweats and a dry burning sensation along the throat where the heart divergent meridian path passes.

The heart meridian traverses the ulnar aspect of the arm and wrist.

HT7 has the Chinese name of shenmen and as such is often chosen for all disorders of the shen. It is the 5 element sedation point (earth on fire) and is used to clear heat. Its location makes it an ideal choice for ulnar side wrist pain.

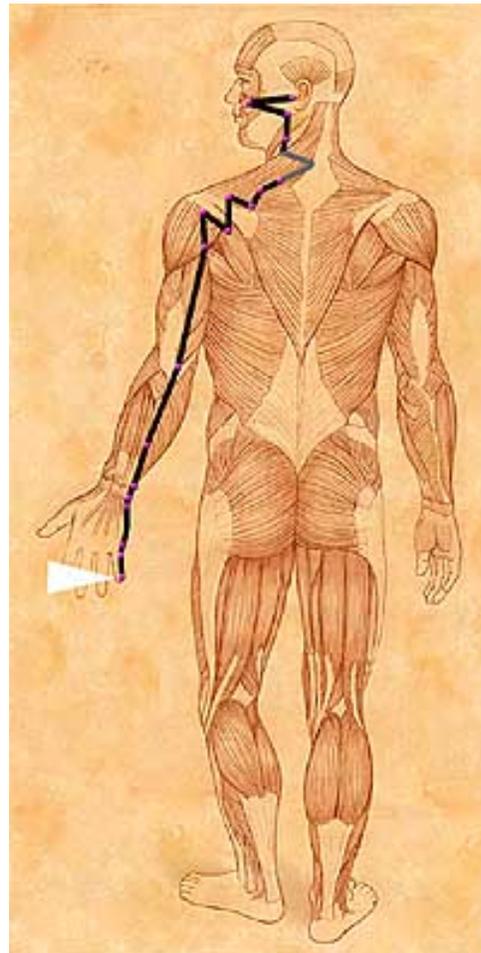


## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Small Intestine of hand tai yang

Deafness, burning eyes, lower abdominal pain,  
shoulder pain

Use distal point SI3



The small intestine meridian of hand tai yang enters the ears and eyes. The fire element is prone to heat disorders so hearing loss and hot disorders of the eye are often indicated.

The small intestine meridian crosses the acromion, the scapula and the posterior lateral aspect of the neck. It is a good choice for pain disorders of the shoulder and neck.

SI3 is the shu stream point of the SI meridian and a powerful distal point for shoulder disorders. It is also the confluent (master) point of the Du Mai and regulates the spine.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Kidney Meridian of foot shao yin

Frequent urination, spermatorrhea, asthma, edema, lumbar pain, 5 heart heat, night sweats

Use distal points KD3, KD6



The Kidney governs water. It is the yin organ that helps the urinary bladder hold in water. The governing of water also relates to the buildup of fluids in the tissues.

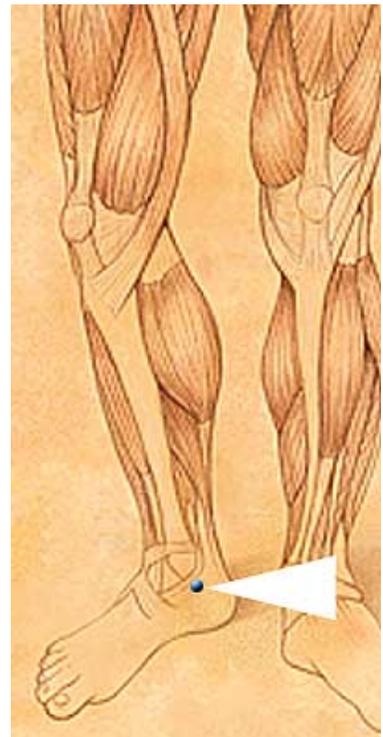
The kidney is also responsible for storing jing. Thus its meridian is indicated for spermatorrhea. The kidney grasps the breath and draws it downward. Asthma with difficulty inhaling is an indication of the kidney meridian.

The low back is the house of the kidney and the qi of the kidney supports the lumbar spine.

KD3, is the yuan-source point of the kidney, and the earth point. Since earth controls water, KD3 is indicated for both tonifying yin and treating edema.

KD6 is the master point of the Yin Qiao Mai and is indicated for emotional disorders due to yin deficiency.

Both KD3 and KD6 are powerful local points for the ankle.

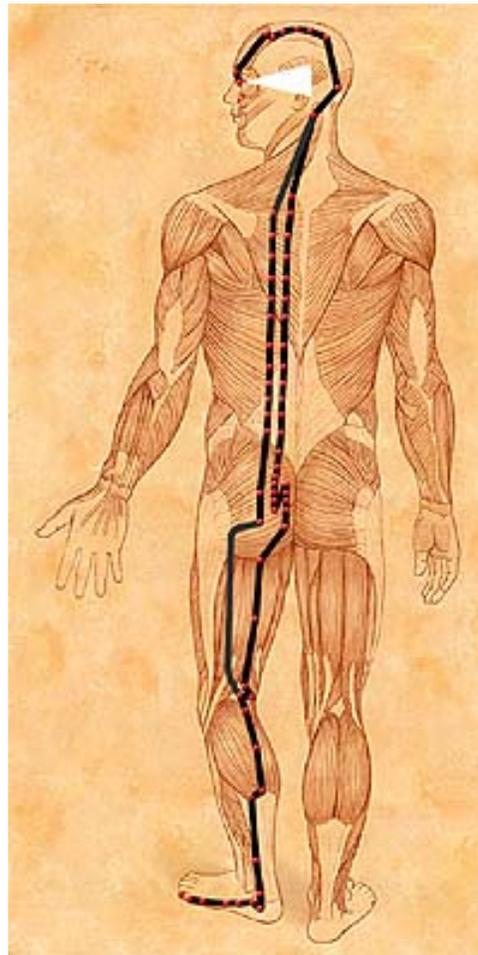


## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Bladder meridian of foot tai yang

Retention of urine, incontinence, eye pain, tearing,  
nasal obstruction, neck and back pain

Use distal points UB40, UB58, UB60



The function of the urinary bladder is to store and expel urine. All diseases of urinary dysfunction can be treated with the urinary bladder meridian.

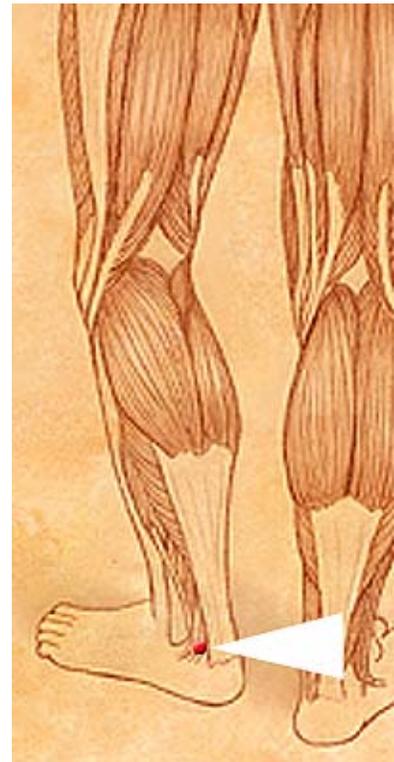
The UB meridian emerges from the medial corner of the eye and is indicated for eye and nose disorders.

The UB meridian traverses the entire back and is indicated for neck and back pain.

UB40 is the He-Sea of the foot tai-yang bladder meridian. As a He-Sea point, it drains dampness, clears heat and eliminates stagnation along the meridian for the treatment of back pain.

UB58 is the luo point and is indicated for excesses along the course of the meridian including back pain, thigh pain and nasal passage obstruction.

UB60 has a strong descending function and drains dampness.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

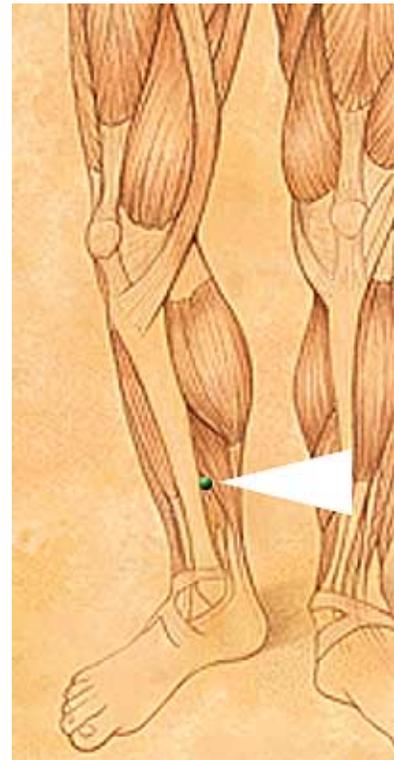
- Liver meridian of foot jue yin  
Low back pain, abdominal pain, reflux, hernia,  
testicular pain, anger  
Use distal points LV3, LV5



The emotion associated with the liver is anger. All forms of anger, frustration, and repressed anger can be treated with the liver meridian. The liver is responsible for the free and even circulation of qi. Use of the liver meridian is indicated for the treatment of pain due to qi stagnation.

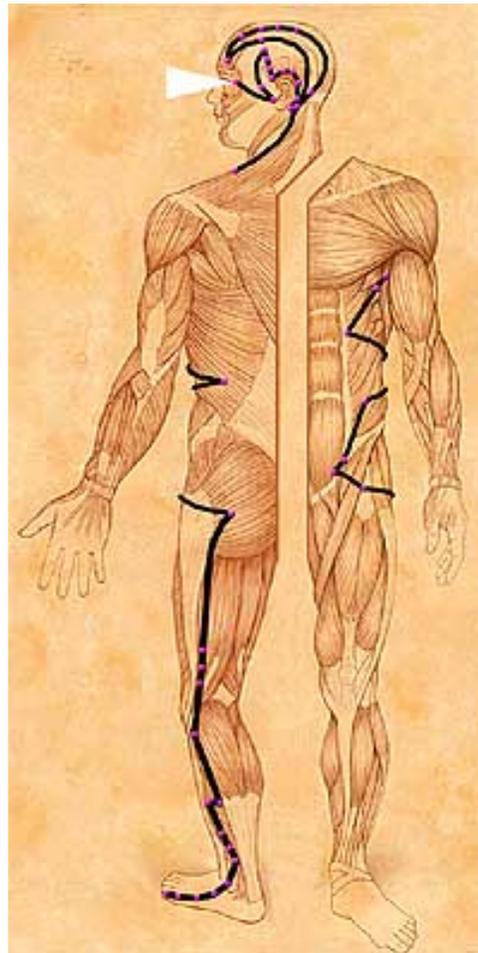
The liver meridian encircles the genitals and enters the lower abdomen. As such, it is also indicated for testicular pain. The liver tends toward excess and can overpower the spleen and stomach causing counterflow qi.

LV3 is the shu-stream and yuan-source point of the liver and the lower gate of the four gates. It strongly invigorates (moves) qi and descends qi. LV5 is the luo point of the liver. LV5 drains excess and treats the genitals and lower abdomen.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Gallbladder meridian of foot shao yang  
Headache, eye pain, hip pain, costal pain, leg pain  
Use distal points GB34, GB39



The Gallbladder meridian emerges from the lateral corner of the eye and travels the lateral aspect of the head. The gallbladder is associated with the wood element and susceptible to heat disorders. Thus, eye disorders and headaches caused by heat can be treated with the gallbladder meridian.

The gallbladder meridian wraps around the costal region of the hip and lateral aspect of the leg. Pain in these regions can be treated with this meridian.

GB34 is the he-sea point of the gallbladder and strongly invigorates stagnant qi and descends qi. It is also the eight hui influential point for sinews and effects all connective tissue in the body. It is a strong local point for the knee.

GB39 is the eight hui influential point for marrow and is used to strengthen both bone and the sea of marrow in the brain. It is also a good local point for the ankle.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- Pericardium meridian of hand jue yin

Nausea, vomit, indigestion, heart palpations,  
heart pain, 5 palm heat, heart phlegm,  
chest oppression, breast disorders, lateral costal pain

Use distal point PC6



Beginning just lateral to the nipple, the Pericardium meridian flows down the more medial aspect of the inner arm, ending in the middle finger and thus the highest point on the body when the arms are raised in the traditional Chinese anatomical position. The Pericardium shares its fire association with the San Jiao and is often called the “stomach meridian of the arm.” Because of this, the Pericardium meridian is indicated in all middle jiao disorders. The Pericardium’s close association with the Heart makes it a natural for treatment of heart disorders, including ghost diseases that may be indicated by phlegm pathologies such as epilepsy and schizophrenia.

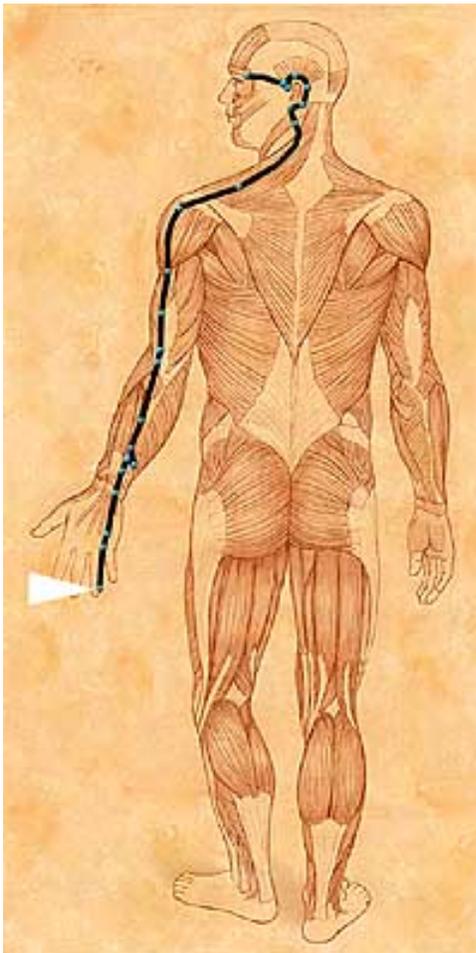
PC6 is the luo connecting point of the pericardium and master point of the Yin Wei Mai making this point the most commonly used point on the PC meridian. It can be employed for a wide range of middle jiao disorders and helps to relieve feelings of oppression in the chest. Since it is the Yin Wei Mai master point, PC6 helps to strengthen the energetic ties of the body’s musculo-tendon system with that of its emotional strength system. Thus, PC6 is also employed as important distal point for shen pathologies.



## Indications of the 12 Main Meridians

- San Jiao meridian of hand shao yang  
Pain/swelling in lateral arm, shoulder and neck  
Sore, swollen throat  
shao yang (alternating fever/chills) condition  
hearing loss, low pitched tinnitus

Use distal point SJ5



The San Jiao meridian begins at the distal aspect of the hand, crossing the forearm medially. Laterally moving up the proximal portion of the arm, the San Jiao meridian wraps around the auricle of the ear and extends an internal branch into the middle ear.

It is important to think of the San Jiao meridian as more conceptual rather than practical in function. Thus, dysfunctions associated with edema or urinary conditions are best left to using kidney or urinary bladder meridian distal points. Instead, the San Jiao meridian path reinforces its use to clear pain and swelling in the lateral aspect of the arm, shoulder and neck. This same path provides points indicated for ear infections, relief of low pitched tinnitus, and lateral headache pain.

The designation of the San Jiao meridian as the pivot or shao yang meridian illustrates its use for draining heat associated with half internal/half external wind conditions.

SJ5 is the luo connecting point of San Jiao and master point of the Yang Wei Mai. As master point of the Yang Wei Mai, SJ5 is a particularly focused point for either opening or closing the exterior of the body's energetic and musculo-tendon system. Thus, SJ5 can serve to drain fever or to strengthen the exterior and is used in the treatment of shao yang, malarial or wind/chill type fever. In this same manner, SJ5 can help to unite the lower and upper musculoskeletal regions of the body and relieve lateral neck and shoulder pain as well as pain in the lower limbs. As a luo connecting point and thru its association with the PC meridian, SJ5 can be useful in the treatment of more acute shen disturbances.

