

Path to Wellness

Get a seasonal tune-up at Pathways

by **Laura Kiritsy**
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You winterize your car, home or apartment, so why not winterize yourself? Pathways to Wellness provides a range of holistic care that can help ward off the physical and mental ravages of a dark New England winter. Perhaps a little immune boosting acupuncture to ward off colds, flu and the dreaded “winter blues” that inevitably comes with carving your car out of yet another plow-packed snow bank. And if the stress of sharing a holiday turkey with your in-laws has your shoulders up around your ears, some Shiatsu massage can bring your bod back into balance.

Says Pathways to Wellness Executive Director Kristen Porter, “Asian medicine is very connected with energetic changes and seasonal changes, so it’s often encouraged that people receive sort of ‘seasonal maintenance’ treatments if you will, like immune boosters and balancing booster treatments around the change of seasons to help offset some of the imbalances that can crop up with less light ... and just the number of flus and little bugs and stuff that start going around.” For those who have received acupuncture treatments consistently in the past, Porter, a licensed acupuncturist, says just one or two treatments at the change of season may do the trick. For those who have never experienced the benefits of the ancient Chinese healing art, which consists of inserting hair-thin needles at specific points on the body to stimulate the body’s natural energy flow, Porter recommends

three to four treatments. For those who suffer chronic symptoms, such as depression, during the winter months, Porter suggests that regular treatments throughout the season might help you make it to Memorial Day without sinking into a depression worthy of Sylvia Plath.

There’s perhaps no better time to fortify yourself for a harsh winter than right now. Pathways recently instituted a Saturday morning program where you can receive an hour-long acupuncture treatment in a small-group setting for the bargain basement price of just \$35. “It’s going to provide people with probably the most affordable acupuncture in the state by licensed practitioners, not by students,” Porter observes.

“It’s an exciting format for us, because it utilizes a traditional Chinese treatment format, which is that treatment happens with typically three to four people in the same room,” she adds. “Each person receives individualized treatment and it’s relaxing in that room, but that is the way that most clinics in China provide acupuncture.”

The low-cost program is in keeping with the non-profit clinic’s guiding philosophy of making holistic complementary therapies — which Porter notes are often covered by traditional health insurance plans — available to everyone. Services are rendered on a sliding scale basis for those who are income eligible. Pathways to Wellness also utilizes a unique payment model called “Share the Care”: Consumers who pay full price for Pathways services are contributing to a free- and reduced-care pool for others who are in need. “Pathways is the only wellness center that has this type of nonprofit public health mission at its roots,” says Porter.

The clinic grew out of the AIDS Care Project, a volunteer organization begun in the late 1980s to provide low-cost or free

acupuncture to ease the symptoms associated with HIV/AIDS. In 2000, the clinic expanded its mission to make complementary therapies accessible to all people, including a sizeable LGBT clientele. Most of the LGB or T clients, says Porter, come seeking treatment for musculoskeletal and pain-related conditions like back pain, headaches and sports injuries, or for help managing chronic ailments like fibromyalgia. The clinic also offers smoking cessation and fertility treatment programs, both of which utilize a combination of acupuncture, Chinese herbs and other complementary therapies.

But Porter says the ideal theory behind Asian medicine is that of prevention. “In our culture here in the U.S. we have not traditionally been very preventatively focused and so wait until something’s broken to fix it,” says Porter, “although there’s a tremendous amount of value in these types of therapies for preventative health.” As noted earlier, acupuncture — the center’s most utilized service — can be effective in boosting the immune system to ward off colds and flu. It also helps to alleviate symptoms associated with allergies. Then, of course, there’s stress. “We could spend a whole interview talking about the health effects of stress,” Porter says, laughing. “Research has shown direct links between stress and what happens in the body and what symptoms and diseases sort of come out of that. At a minimum buy-in level, if you can embrace the idea that holistic therapies really can impact stress — if you think of massage, for example. I think most people would get that massage is really

good for stress reduction. And to then make that leap that stress has all kinds of physiological effects on the body that then lead over time to different types of disorders and symptoms ... if you can work on just even the stress aspect of somebody’s life you will have a preventative impact.”

Beyond meeting the immediate treatment needs of its clientele, Pathways to Wellness also engages in research studies to examine the values of Asian medicine in the treatment of various ailments. The clinic will soon begin researching the effects of acupuncture on controlling the digestive effects symptoms associated highly active antiretroviral therapy, better known as HAART, the treatment of choice for people living with HIV/AIDS. Also, Pathways has received a grant from the Department of Defense to research the effects of acupuncture in the treatment of war veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

For those with less complicated needs, Pathways to Wellness will be teaming up on Jan. 10 with local Whole Foods Markets for a benefit in which five percent of your purchases that day will be donated to the clinic. Check out pathwaysboston.org for a soon-to-be-posted list of participating locations (or subscribe to the clinic’s e-newsletter). It’s a darn good reason to stock up on lots of nutritious goodies in preparation for a long — and healthy — winter.

Pathways to Wellness is located at 142 Berkeley St., 2nd floor, Boston. Call 617.859.3036 or visit www.pathwaysboston.org.