

# Use of accupuncture

**Editor's Note:** The following is excerpted from anthropological papers of the University of Alaska, Vol. 8. No. 1, Dec. 1959:

Despite the Eskimos' and Aleuts' fear of flow of blood (because it was thought that the soul might flow out), nevertheless bleeding was practiced to relieve congestion. To relieve the discomfort of a joint that ached and was swollen, a needle or more frequently a stone knife, kept specifically for this purpose, was used to pierce the skin over the affected joint, in any part of the body. The practitioner did not suck out anything, he simply let the wound bleed for a short time. The instrument used, whether a needle or a sharp stone knife, was a special one and the person who attempted curing by this method also was a man with much experience in the technique.

Nearly every informant said that one had to be careful not to allow too much blood to flow but how much was "too much" could not be stated. It seemed likely that little

blood was lost. The knife, for example, pierced the fleshy part of the leg just above the knee, there being no attempt to stick the lancet directly into the joint. On Nunivak Island the skin immediately above the joint was pinched up and held tightly and then a small hole punched through the fold of skin from one side to the other. Occasionally, the lancet was stuck straight into the flesh, especially in the case of painful or swollen knees. To stop the bleeding, the skin simply was pressed together. There was neither intentional nor unintentional sterilization of the instruments.

More common conditions requiring blood-letting were headache and snow blindness. In some cases, for headache a very small incision was made; in others, a rather long incision might be made. To stop bleeding, the edges of the incision were pressed together.

In a case of snow blindness the upper eyelid would be pulled out and its underside cut. A couple of people said that the skin between the eyes might be pinched and an incision

made through the fold of skin from one side to the other. Another person said that one should scratch the upper eyelid along the eyelashes, allowing it to bleed. Bleeding was said to be a quick remedy for snow blindness.

The bleeding was an alternative to use of tobacco juice or cranberry juice, that is, it was not used in conjunction with the plant juices. The variation in treatment and medication was not from village to village but from individual to individual within a village, the patient apparently having a choice. Or it may have been that he would try one and if that did not help, he would try the other.