



Whole Family Health

Fall 2008

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Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Treatment of Headache

Acupuncture has been in the news recently for treating both migraines and chronic headaches. From a traditional Chinese medicine perspective, headache can be caused by both external and internal factors (walking outside in cold weather without a hat, for example, versus a headache after a bad fight with a loved one).

Both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can be used for treating headaches. For a practitioner using only acupuncture, the most important piece of information is where the headache is located. Many acupuncture channels meet in the head, and different areas correspond to different channels. To treat a frontal headache, the stomach channel is used; to treat a temporal headache, the Gall Bladder channel is used. If herbal medicine is also appropriate, it is important to look at the type of headache. For example, is it a splitting headache, a dull ache or does the head feel like it is tightly bound? Is it worse in the morning or in the evening? This type of information, along with other whole body symptoms, guide a practitioner in developing a pattern diagnosis.

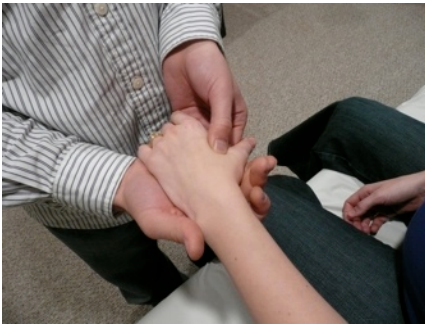
Different headaches respond better to different treatments. In my experience, very chronic headaches that were either caused by trauma, seem to be related to a woman's menstrual cycle, or are exacerbated by fatigue tend to respond better to a combination of acupuncture and herbal medicine. For headaches that are the result of muscle tension, acupuncture is usually the better choice.

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Acupressure Points for Headaches

There are several acupuncture points that can be helpful for headaches. Some points are used for headaches in specific locations. For all the points listed below, use strong pressure for 5-10 minutes or until the headache eases.

Large Intestine 4



This is a good point for any type of headache. LI 4 is located between the first and second metacarpal bones (the bones in your palm). An easy way to locate this point is to squeeze the thumb and first finger together, forming a bulge in the muscle. The point is located at the highest point of this bulge.

Gall Bladder 41



This point is useful for migraine type headaches located in the temple region or behind the eyes. Use fingernail pressure. GB 41 is located on the foot in the space between the 4th and 5th toes. If you flex your foot you will see a tendon running across this space. GB 41 is located on the side of the tendon closest to the ankle.

Stomach 44



This point is for frontal headaches. Use fingernail pressure. Try combining this with a cool washcloth on the forehead. St 44 is located on your foot, between your second and third toes, right where the toes join the foot.

Fall Fruits

Eating seasonally is an important part of Chinese food therapy. Often the foods that are available during a certain season have medicinal properties that address common illnesses of that same season.



Pears

In Chinese dietary therapy, pears are considered to have a sweet and slightly sour flavor and a cooling effect on the body. They clear heat, promote the production of body fluids, moisten dryness and dissolve phlegm. Pears are excellent for several types of cough: a dry cough very common in mid-Autumn, a cough with a sore throat or a cough with thick, yellowish phlegm. To treat, try eating the pears out of hand, coring and steaming them, or boiling pear juice with a few slices of ginger and adding honey to taste. Pears are not helpful for coughs with thin, clear phlegm or for people with loose stools or diarrhea.

Pomegranates

The pomegranate is common to most of China and is available in the Fall. It has a sweet, slightly sour and astringent flavor. Pomegranates are considered to have a neutral temperature, so they are good for any constitutional type. They promote the production of body fluids, ease thirst, and astringe and arrest diarrhea. For thirst and a dry throat, eat fresh pomegranates or drink the juice. For persistent diarrhea, chop up the entire fruit with the peel, place in a pot and cover with 2 inches of water and boil for 20 minutes.