

SHULAN CLINIC – ACUPUNCTURE • CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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M.E. – by Prof. Shulan Tang

What Is M.E.?

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, M.E., is a disease characterised by disabling fatigue and exhaustion together with a diverse range of symptoms. 'Myalgic' means pain in the muscles and 'encephalomyelitis' means inflammation of the brain and nerves. The typical symptoms are mental and physical exhaustion, muscle pain and weakness, insomnia, palpitation, lack of concentration, eye pain and light sensitivity, gastrointestinal disturbance and abdominal pain, fever, chills and night sweats, etc.

Because of the confusion over the definition and diagnosis of the disease, many different names are given to the disease. It is called Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome, Chronic Epsteinbarr Virus Syndrome, Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

What causes it in terms of TCM?

Pathogenic dampness, complicated by antibiotics, is a root cause of M.E in terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Dampness is heavy and turbid in nature. A damp disease is usually marked by heavy sensations as lassitude, heavy sensation of the head and body, and aching and sluggishness of the limbs.

Pathogenic dampness is differentiated into exopathic dampness and endogenous dampness. Exopathic dampness is usually due to damp climate, wading in water or being caught in the rain, as well as living in a damp environment. Endogenous dampness is usually caused by the dysfunction of the spleen in transportation leading to the impairment of water metabolism. Exopathic and endogenous dampness can influence each other and are interdependent.

Some other factors are also liable to the accumulation of interior dampness. Over-consumption of dairy products is a typical one. Dairy products are usually damp in nature and are high in protein. They burden the stomach and spleen in one aspect and directly attack the spleen to cause the dysfunction of the spleen in fluid transportation and transformation, thus causing retention of dampness within the body. The over use of antibiotics during virus infection can be another factor to cause the accumulation of interior dampness. Anti-biotics are always cold in nature because of their anti-inflammatory function. In terms of TCM, persistent cold disturbs the spleen and stomach and therefore results in deficiency of the spleen. This is why stomachs can feel upset when taking them.

The pace of our lives in today's increasingly competitive society contributes greatly to the high occurrence of M.E. . Today, we tend to not only over-use our bodies and brains but also to try to alter the physiological balance we need in our lives. We sleep less, eat unhealthy food, become addicted to smoking and drinking, exercise less and less, work more and more, and create more stress for ourselves. The result of such actions is a deficiency of Spleen Qi which in turn results in the accumulation of dampness in the interior.

Diagnosis And Differentiation

Besides pathogenic dampness, pathogenic heat and pathogenic cold can also be agents responsible for M.E.

independently or combined with the dampness. Although many different types can be differentiated, but the most common types are dampness, damp-heat and cold-damp accumulated in the interior. The dampness type with no obvious appearance of pathogenic heat or cold, usually occurs in those who are physically deficient. The damp-heat type is most common in younger patients, or in those who were healthy before having M.E., or in those who have addictions to smoking and drinking. Cold-damp type is most common in patients who have a cold constitution.

It also should be pointed out that M.E. has two stages in general: acute and chronic. In the acute stage, the patients show symptoms of the initial disease besides the M.E. symptoms. This stage is usually short, from a few months to a year. In the chronic stage, the symptoms of the initial disease are less apparent. The main symptoms are lack of energy and drowsiness. This stage could last for many years.

Treatment

After a proper diagnosis and differentiation of the syndrome, the principle of the treatment is made clear; that of tonifying the spleen and expelling dampness. Thanks to the rich Chinese medical classics, a great number of classic treatment plans can be referred to in reaching appropriate treatment principles. Pathogenic heat and cold mingled in the syndrome can then be taken care of by adjusting the prescription accordingly.

Both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine are suitable for the treatment of M.E. syndrome. Personally I use more herbal medicine than acupuncture in the treatment of this particular condition.

I treat M.E. patients very regularly. My clinical experience indicates a very favourable conclusion: M.E., to a great extent, is treatable. A good example is a 21 year old man from Blackburn who had M.E. for 5 years. His legs were so weak that he had to be helped to come to visit my clinic for the first three times. His main symptoms were aching muscles, muscle atrophy, feelings of bloating and nausea, lack of energy, extreme tiredness, cold sensations throughout the body.

After taking ME Powder 1, which was formulated by myself for cold-damp type M.E., for three weeks, he could walk on his own into my clinic without any help. Other symptoms were also greatly relieved. After three months of treatment, most of his symptoms had disappeared and, in particular, his muscles showed an apparent re-growth which made him extremely happy. Now, he has got a new job and we are still in touch.

Self Help

Try to live your life in a more sensible way, with plenty of rest, appropriate diet, and physical exercise if possible. Also try to avoid any lengthy exposure to damp conditions.

For **damp-heat types**, eat less hot food such as chilli, curry sauce, lamb, etc., avoid smoking and alcohol, and try to control your emotions.

For **cold-damp types**, try to keep warm,, use moxibustion or musk oil to warm and relax muscles and avoid taking cold food and drink.