

SHULAN CLINIC – ACUPUNCTURE • CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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Migraine – by Prof. Shulan Tang

Migraine headaches are characterised by throbbing, often severe pain, usually on one side of the head. They may also be accompanied by visual disturbances and/or nausea and vomiting. Attacks may last from a few hours to several days. Migraines affect about one in ten of the population and about 70% of all migraine sufferers are women. It is believed that changing hormone levels during menstruation, ovulation and menopause may trigger attacks.

The headache pain is thought to be caused by a spasm, which occurs in the blood vessels of the brain. These blood vessels first contract and then expand resulting in throbbing pain. Certain types of food may also trigger migraine such as overripe cheese, citrus fruits, chocolate, red wine, coffee, red meat, etc. The pill can also provoke migraine in susceptible women.

In terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), there are different types of migraine. External wind-cold or wind-heat both cause headaches but are not classified as migraine. Its primary pathogenic changes are mainly due to the following four types:

Rising of Liver Yang

Due to stress, emotional problems, Liver Qi stagnation, or Kidney Yin deficiency, causing the Liver Yang to rise which disturbs the head.

Symptoms include:

Migraine, blurring of the vision which is made worse when stressed; also the sufferer may experience hot flushes, thirst, red tongue and a taut pulse.

This type is often seen in high blood pressure sufferers.

Treatment:

Calm the Liver and suppress Yang.

Prescription:

Tian Ma Gou Teng Wan: Tian Ma, Gou Teng, Shi Ju Ming, Shan Yao, Huang Qin, Chuan Niu Xi, Du Zhong, Yi Mu Cao, Sang Ji Sheng, Ye Jiao Teng, Fu Shen.

Blood Deficiency

Blood deficiency caused by failure of the blood to nourish the head correctly.

Symptoms:

Headache, dizziness, palpitations, often worse in the afternoon, tiredness, pale complexion, associated with a heavy period, or in women who have had many children. Also pale tongue and thready pulse, often seen in people who are anaemic.

Treatment:

Tonify the Yin-Blood.

Prescription:

Gui Pi Tang: Bai Zhu, Fu Shen, Huang Qi, Long Yan Rou, Suan Zao Yen, Ren Shen, Mu Xiang, Zhi Gan Cao, Dang Gui, Yuan Zhi.

Blood Stasis type

Blood stagnation causing pain in the head.

Symptoms:

Migraine pain in a fixed place or a needle-like pricking pain. This may occur if the patient has a history of external injury. Also associated with a purple tongue, thready and hesitant pulse, often seen in head injury victims and may include a stubborn headache.

Treatment:

Disperse blood stasis and dredge the collaterals.

Prescription:

Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang: Dang Gui, Chuan Xiong, Chi Shao, Tao Ren, Hong Hua, Niu Xi, Chai Hu, Jie Geng, Zhi Ke, Sheng Di Huang, Gan Cao.

Acupuncture is also an effective treatment for migraine. Most cases can be relieved during or immediately after acupuncture. The selection of acupuncture points will depend on the different types of migraine. To stabilise mild migraine or severe migraine stabilised, there are herbal patent medicines, which help to prevent the attack with the additional bonus of improving general health. Essential balm (Feng You Jing) a special Chinese herbal oil with cooling properties can be used externally to relieve wind attack or heat-type migraine headaches with burning sensation.

Feng Shi You, another Chinese herbal oil with warm properties, can be used externally for damp-cold type migraines.

Case History

A shop owner had suffered from migraines since 1995, with 1 to 14 attacks each month, lasting up to 3 days. She first came to visit me in March 1998. At that time she was having 14 migraines a month, with the pain located on the front, back and top of the head. A hot feeling accompanied the pain. She also had hot flushes, felt lethargic, constipated and her tongue was red with a little coating on it. This is the Liver Yang rising type of migraine.

I gave her acupuncture, using the points Tai Yang, Yang Bai, Qu Chi, He Gu, Lie Que and San Yin Jiao, five days of herbal medication and one week of herbal patent Qi Ju Di Huang. Two weeks later she felt a lot better with just mild headaches. After a further two weeks the migraine had reduced even more and the patient had more energy. Although she admitted she disliked the taste of the herbal tea, after another treatment her condition had improved further.

By her third visit the patient had not had any bad attacks for two weeks. She now has follow up sessions once a month to prevent further attacks. To conclude, although the migraines have now ceased, more importantly, the treatment resulted in the patient feeling more relaxed, less stressed and generally better in health overall.