

SHULAN CLINIC – ACUPUNCTURE • CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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TCM & Sea Sickness – by Prof. Shulan Tang

The movie Titanic - what an epic love story! It moved thousands and thousands of people to tears. Surprisingly, even though the tragedy claimed so many lives, it has created even more interest in sea travel. It is well known that a good proportion of the population suffer from sea-sickness. Is there anything we can do to help with the problem? The answer is yes! A lady in her forties came to see me earlier this year seeking help for her sea-sickness.

She had arranged a cruise holiday with her friends in the summer. She had suffered from sea-sickness since she was a small girl, but each time she went out to sea, she felt sick and would vomit. Dizziness, a general feeling of coldness, drowsiness and loss of appetite accompanied this. Once she was off the boat, she would feel very hungry.

When she came to see me she complained that she had a very stressful job, her stomach would bloat up, she had cold hands and feet, and a pale complexion. She had a pink tongue with a whitish coating, and a soft pulse.

In terms of TCM diagnosis, her body's constitution is deficiency in the spleen and stomach with excessive cold and dampness. While on the sea, the extreme dampness and cold could easily invade the body to trigger the sea-sickness syndrome. The first step would be to strengthen the spleen and stomach, to expel the cold and damp and to promote the body circulation in order to change her body's constitution from weak-cold-damp to one stronger, warmer and damp free.

She received acupuncture using the points, Tiansu, Zhusanli and Neiguan together with a week's prescription of Chinese herbal medicine, Huo Zhu San, to awaken the spleen.

She came to see me two weeks after the treatment and said she felt warmer, although she did not like the taste of the powder. She received a second session of acupuncture with the same herbal treatment, but this time in a capsule. Five weeks later she felt much warmer and more energetic. She received the same treatment to consolidate the results.

Eight weeks later, after another session of acupuncture, she felt very relaxed and energetic. The same herbal treatment was given again. Before she went on her cruise holiday in June, she came to see me once more. She was full of confidence and ready for her holiday.

Besides her acupuncture treatment, she was prescribed Xiang Sha Yang Wei Wan to take while on holiday to keep the stomach warm and Huo Xiang Zheng Qi Shui to keep in her handbag in case she felt sick.

The next time I heard from her was in July, when she called me after coming back from holiday. She was very cheerful and had not suffered from sea-sickness during her entire holiday.

In terms of TCM, the spleen has the function of absorbing and transporting water. An abnormality of this function can cause accumulation of dampness and even water retention. The excess dampness will then give rise to the adverse flow of Stomach Qi. When invaded by external dampness, the weak spleen can be overloaded and unable to perform its function and the adverse flow of stomach Qi worsens. When this happens, one feels sick, nauseous, dizzy, etc.

Based on the above understanding, one would be able to employ the preventative measures for this particular sickness as discussed in the case above.

As is well known, TCM is very different in its approach from conventional medicine. TCM emphasises the analysis of all the symptoms and experience of the patient, and all aspects of the individual as a whole. Its object is the patient and the cause of disease.

Its method is to draw an overall picture of the patient in order to evaluate any patterns of disharmony that may have arisen. Its aim is to regain harmony through the bodily system itself with the assistance of a carefully drawn-up prescription of Chinese medicine. This is why a lot of Chinese can look after their health quite well since in a lot of cases, the conditions have been taken care of before it has developed.

As an old saying puts it:

“A great physician is good at treating non-existent illness, rather than treating existent disease.”

The scope of Chinese medicine is enormous.