



Chinese Medicine News

from the office of Michael Waterhouse, MA, OMD, LAc

ACUPUNCTURE IN THE TREATMENT OF LOWER BACK AND NECK PAIN

For many hundreds of years acupuncture has been used to relieve the pain of an aching spine. Here at the Rochford Clinic for the last 25 years we have used a combination of chiropractic, massage and acupuncture to treat successfully these conditions that are now the second most frequent reason why patients visit their doctors. Recently there has been increased media scrutiny of these problems and they have taken note of the high volume of patients who seek out these "alternative" methods to cure their pain. Although generally positive in their tone, these articles often say that there is a dearth of evidence to demonstrate that they work. Apart from the many years of empirical evidence, there are in fact a number of studies that now back up the positive results that patients have experienced using these treatments for their neck and back pain.

A study was recently presented at the 10th Annual Symposium on Complementary Health Care in London. It divided 2807 patients into

an acupuncture group and a non acupuncture group. Both groups continued to receive conventional treatments such as physical therapy and medications. After three months of treatment, the acupuncture group showed significantly greater improvement in both back function and quality of life scores. Another recent study worthy of note because it focused on older patients was reported in the journal *Rheumatology*. Fifty five patients over sixty years of age who had suffered from lower back pain for more than 12 weeks received acupuncture for five weeks and when compared to a similar group who received conventional treatment alone were found to have significantly better quality of life scores and fewer medication side effects.

The amount of treatment required for neck and back pain depends of the cause and duration of the problem. Very often, an acute muscle spasm can be resolved in just a few treatments. The more chronic the problem, the more treatment will be required, especially if there is significant disc degeneration or bulging. However, my experience is that, even when MRIs and X-Rays reveal obvious pathology, a course of acupuncture is worthwhile before more invasive procedures are attempted. Acupuncture can achieve these results by normalizing muscular tension, increasing local blood circulation which reduces tissue swelling and inflammation, and lastly by stimulating the Central Nervous System to release beta endorphins that help to reduce pain and stress in the body as a whole. Having said all this, it is important to remember that regular and appropriate exercise is always a key to a speedy recovery.



Knowledge speaks, wisdom listens

TENSION HEADACHES & MIGRAINES

Muscular tension in the upper back and neck can lead to the frequent occurrence of headaches; the treatment of these headaches is very similar to the treatment of neck pain outlined in the main article of this newsletter. Muscular tension can also be a factor in the cause of migraine headaches, but certainly there are many other factors including diet, stress, allergies, vascular and hormonal imbalances. The resulting condition is responsible for the loss of over 157 million workdays each year. While it is very difficult to completely get rid of migraines, my experience is that the intensity and frequency of the attacks can be significantly reduced. This is also the conclusion of a study from Europe presented at a symposium in London last year on the acupuncture treatment of chronic tension headaches and migraines. Over 400 patients were randomized to receive either acupuncture (12 treatments over 3 months) or standard care. One year after the start of the trial the acupuncture group experienced 23.4 less headache days per year, better functioning, more energy and improved overall health, they used 14% less medication and made 30% fewer visits to their physician. Everyone's headaches are unique - please feel free to talk to me regarding any questions you might have about yours or those of someone you know.



"I met Mike Waterhouse in 1997 at the UCLA Pediatric Pain Clinic where my son, Grant, was being treated for acute headaches. Mike was part of the team that solved his headache problems. After I suffered an acute shoulder injury on the job as a firefighter, my orthopedic surgeon referred me to Mike for pain relief. I had bi-weekly acupuncture treatments prior to and post shoulder surgery and was able to use NO post surgery pain medication."

"I have continued to be treated weekly for chronic pain relief from work related injuries, i.e., knees, lower back and neck. Today, after a 30-year career as a firefighter, having had six surgeries, I am able to manage my pain and arthritis effectively with acupuncture treatments."

T.O., Los Angeles City Fire Department

The Newsletter will be published several times per year to inform patients interested in the rapidly evolving world of Chinese Medicine. Please feel free to talk to me if you need more information or have questions about this or related fields. You can always contact me via e mail or through my web site.

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