

Headaches are one of the most common conditions treated with Acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine. Migraines are severe, recurring headaches that are often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to light and noise. However, effective results depend firstly on an accurate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) diagnosis and then a skilful acupuncture treatment, or a professionally written Chinese herbal prescription.

Headaches vary in intensity and frequency with migraines being the most severe. Migraines are often the result of several causative factors occurring together, and require a detailed analysis of the causes and characteristics of the headache.

TCM diagnosis firstly involves understanding the causes of the condition:

- * A person's constitution can play a part because hereditary weakness usually results in headaches starting in childhood.
- * Working long hours without rest depletes your energy (Qi) and can lead to one sided headaches.
- * Eating too much or too little can lead to frontal headaches, while excessive amounts of hot spicy foods can lead to internal heat and lateral or one sided headaches.
- * Too much fried and sweet foods can lead to dull heavy headaches. Coffee or chocolate can precipitate a migraine. And eating irregularly or late at night can start a pattern of dull headaches.
- * Chronic headaches can occur as a result of trauma to the head, perhaps years previously or as a child. Then current illnesses, like digestive disorders or emotional stresses, can create the conditions for a headache to occur around the original injury.
- * Acute headaches associated with common colds and flu occur as a result of external pathogenic factors like wind, cold and heat obstructing the normal flow of Qi in the acupuncture channels on the head causing pain. Thousands of years ago the Chinese recognised the association of Wind and other climatic factors with many common complaints including the common cold. So use your scarf or beanie on windy days.

Finally, the most common cause of headaches according to TCM are the Emotions. The emotions are associated with particular internal organs and when work, family or other stresses lead to emotional upset, the functions of those internal organs is affected and numerous health problems will occur. For instance, anger and frustration will cause the Liver Qi to stagnate and flare up as emotional outbursts. One sided headaches are typical outcomes while migraines are extreme results of this Liver Qi being confined and then suddenly the constrained Qi rushes upwards to the head causing severe pain. Nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light are further outcomes of your Qi rushing upwards and affecting the stomach and eyes.

Excessive periods of concentration and mental activity can lead to headaches in children as they struggle to cope with expectations. Hours in front of TV or computer games strain the eyes and this stress will transmit from the eyes to the interior of the body. Again this affects the Liver Qi and headaches can result.

The next part of the TCM diagnostic process for headaches is to determine which part of the head is affected. Each area on the head is traversed by different acupuncture channels and identifying where the pain is indicates which channels are affected.

Then the characteristics of the pain are determined. Sharp, stabbing, dull, heavy, throbbing, continuous or intermittent pain is information that helps determine the underlying pattern of disharmony.

Treatments are based on all the information gathered. Each headache in every individual is somewhat unique and requires individual treatment. By treating the exact presentation of each headache, the underlying causes are tackled and the intensity and frequency of headaches diminish. Headaches and migraines are a very common and debilitating health problem that respond well to treatment using TCM.

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