

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir/Madam

Please explain the association between constipation and neck pain, lower back pain and headache. Perhaps, it is just poor think [sic] and lack of clinical skills.

Edwin Y Miao
18 December 2009

*Reference: AJACM 2008;3(2):22–27
Acupuncture for the Treatment of Normal
Transit Constipation: A Case Report
JZ Kremer & JC Deare*

Authors' response

In the seventy-fifth chapter of the *Suwen*, Huang Di states, 'Do not forget that the myriad things of the universe have an intimate relationship with one another. They present as varied as yin and yang, internal and external, male and female, upper and lower, but they are all interconnected'.¹ As an holistic medical system, Chinese medicine regards the body, mind and spirit as an integrated, energetic whole. Thus while seemingly independent signs and symptoms may

arise in an individual, at a fundamental level these expressions of disharmony are regarded as manifestations of a single underlying pathology.

For six months prior to the documented treatments, the patient had been taking a powerful laxative that would normally only be prescribed for 1 to 2 weeks. The long-term purgative action of this agent had depleted the patient's body fluids, dried her stools and injured the Kidney Yin. Kidney Yin deficiency had given rise to lower back pain and Empty Heat had further dehydrated the patient's intestinal fluids, so compounding the existing constipation.

This connectivity of symptoms was also evident in the patient's neck pain, which resulted from a fractured cervical vertebra suffered in childhood. The neck pain centered on the point LI 18 *Futu*, was regarded as an obstruction of the Large Intestine channel from which subsequent headaches had developed. This channel obstruction was also disrupting the function of Large Intestine organ (as above, so below) thereby contributing further to constipation.

Since the Large Intestine is responsible for excreting all turbid wastes from the body, it can be understood that any obstruction of this function will cause the entire system to suffer through increased toxicity and a reduction of free flow. Thus a person with long-term constipation may experience a worsening of pre-existing conditions including – low back pain, neck pain and headache.

Your comment suggests that while the holistic philosophy that underpins Chinese medicine has been established in texts both ancient and new, those who have fully grasped the implications of these subtle formulations remain relatively few.

Reference

1. The yellow emperor's classic of medicine: a new translation of the *neijing suwen* with commentary. Ni MS, translator and commentator. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications; 1995. p. 287.

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