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Nourish, Stimulate, and Calm Your Brain

It may sound strange to learn that cognitive function is not solely the job of the brain alone; other parts and organs of the body are involved--the heart and kidneys both partner with the brain to nurture a healthy and attentive mind. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help optimize your brain power through a treatment approach that incorporates different modalities, including nutritional support.



One reason why the heart needs constant attention is because it must constantly pump blood throughout the body via the blood vessels. Oxygen and vital substances are delivered to the brain in this manner to stimulate or calm it. The heart also has another important responsibility relating to the sustainability of the brain: to house the *Shen*.

The concept of the *Shen* can be described as the spirit or mind of a person. According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the spirit, or *Shen*, embodies consciousness, emotions and thought. *Shen* influences long-term memory and the ability to think clearly, contributes to wisdom, and presides over activities that involve mental and creative functions. When the mind is healthy, we are able to think clearly. When the mind is unhealthy or unbalanced, we experience confusion, poor memory and clouded thinking.

The kidneys also contribute to a healthy brain as they supply a vital substance called *Jing*, which then produces marrow. *Jing* is a unique, fundamental substance necessary for human life. *Marrow* is the material foundation for the central nervous system and is the matter that 'fills up' the brain, thus the brain is referred to as the *Sea of Marrow*.

The *Sea of Marrow* is indispensable for memory and concentration. It also rules over the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing and seeing. It is natural for the *Sea of Marrow* to wane as we grow older. However, there are acupuncture and Oriental medicine treatments that can help nurture even the most mature brain.

A healthy mind involves harmony between the brain, or *Sea of Marrow*, and the spirit, or *Shen*. Disharmony of the mind often manifests as anxiety, insomnia, muddled thinking, forgetfulness and chronic restlessness. Meditation and acupuncture, as well as diet and physical exercises such as Tai Chi or Qi Gong can balance and strengthen the mind.

Want to optimize your cognitive function and mental health? Call for a consultation today!

Boost Your Mental Energy, Recall, and Focus

Are you having difficulties recalling what you ate for dinner last night, or do you tend to forget what you are talking about in mid conversation? Do you have trouble coming up with new ideas or find yourself having to study twice as much to retain half the information?

Fuzzy thinking can muddle our words as much as our thoughts. It can drain our creative juices, zap our confidence and make us question our intelligence.

Here are a few acupressure exercises to improve your mental function:

Mental Energy Boost

For a quick boost of mental energy, press point *Shuigou*. It is located between the bottom of your nose and your upper lip, in the vertical groove that is technically called the philtrum. Simply tap the area with moderate force for about 30 seconds to help revitalize your mind and bring your awareness back to the present moment.

Memory Recall Boost

When you're struggling to recall information and can't quite do it, try applying pressure to point *Yangbai*. To locate this point, find the middle of your eyebrows with your fingertips and slide upwards about half an inch. Just press and make tiny circular motions for a minute or two. Doing this gentle exercise may help coax the information from your mind you are looking for.

Focus and Learning Boost

To enhance your focus and learning ability press on point *Yintang*, located between the eyebrows and sometimes referred to as "the third eye." The translation for *Yintang*, is "hall of impression."

A "hall" is defined as a corridor or passageway, or the large entrance room of a house. An "impression" is defined as a strong effect produced on the intellect, emotions or conscience. Thus, *Yintang* is the entrance or passageway to the mind.

Yintang is used to improve mental clarity, concentration and cognitive function, as well as soothe emotions and relieve stress, anxiety and agitation.

For effective self-administered acupressure:

- Breathe deeply
- Focus on the point as pressure is applied
- Pressure should be strong but not uncomfortable
- Begin when you first feel symptoms and continue until they subside

Exercises to Improve Concentration

Trouble focusing on your work or losing steam mid-way? Oriental medicine has innovative approaches to restoring concentration, based on an interpretation of Qi, the energy which powers the body and the mind. According to Oriental Medicine, Qi stems from four main components of diet, exercise, rest and mental activity, each of which tend to vary in terms of quality, quantity, frequency, and duration.

Looking at these components, you may realize you need to make adjustments to your diet, fitness, and relaxation strategies in order to make them more sustainable and conducive to improved brain function and overall health. If you are bloated or tired after meals or struggling to fall asleep after turning off the computer, you already know what actions you need to take to nourish your Qi and mind! Meditation and Tai Chi can also help calm and focus the mind. Try integrating these exercises, to nourish and improve your concentration.

Eye Exercise for Concentration

Prolonged focus on a fixed location can cause eyestrain as well as Qi Stagnation, impairing circulation and concentration. You should routinely change your focus from your phone or computer to a point in the distance. Additionally, try taking short breaks and rolling your eyes in circles, both clockwise and counter-clockwise, 10-20 times in each direction, to relieve strain.

Hand Exercise for Concentration

Manipulating the hands can recharge the mind, according to Oriental medicine. Try using *Baoding* balls, which are small spheres made of wood, stone, metal, or clay which range from 1.8mm and up in diameter.

Place one ball in the hand and try to pass it to each finger, then try rotating two balls within your palm.

Breathing for Concentration

Breathing exercises redirect your focus to the Liver, which also is the first organ and meridian system affected in times of emotional stress. As an everyday practice, try breathing in and out, holding the breath, then exhaling again. Force yourself to "let go" even more, which stimulates an even deeper inhalation. Lengthening the breath can calm the mind and redirect your focus away from stress.

Meditate to Increase Focus

Create a quiet, relaxing environment, with comforting items (candles, incense, art that has a spiritual importance to you, etc.) around you.

Sit upright on a cushion with legs folded, or in a chair with your feet firmly planted on the ground, allowing for free and easy breathing. Relax your shoulders and gently place your hands on your knees or in your lap.

Tuck your chin in slightly and keep your eyes half open, your gaze softly focusing downward about four to six feet in front, and your mouth slightly open. Observe your breath.

Try belly-breathing -- not breathing with the chest, but from the navel. Don't accentuate or alter the way you are breathing, just let your attention rest on the flow of your breath.

The goal is to allow the "chattering" in your mind to gradually fade away. If you're distracted by a thought, gently bring your mind back to your breathing. Continue to focus on your breathing for 10 or 15 minutes.

Stay relaxed, yet awake and attentive. Finding your balance there is not easy! Eventually, as your body understands what you are doing, meditating will become easier to enter into. Remember to be gentle and patient with yourself. Meditating for even 5 or 10 minutes can have a powerful effect on your day.

Acupuncture Increases Brain Function for Patients with MCI

There has been a push in recent years to study mild cognitive impairment (MCI), which causes issues with memory, cognition and learning. MCI occurs prior to the onset of Alzheimer's disease and symptoms go beyond normal, age-related changes.

There are no pharmacological drugs available to treat MCI in the long-run, so researchers set out to discover if acupuncture could provide substantial medical benefits. The results of their efforts appear in the study "Modulatory effects of acupuncture on brain networks in mild cognitive impairment patients" published in the February 2017 issue of *Neural Regeneration Research*.



Half of the study participants received real acupuncture treatments specifically designed to improve cognitive functions in the brain. The other half of the patients received sham acupuncture which did not specifically treat MCI or increase cognitive function. All of the study participants had five acupuncture sessions per week for one month.

Using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), researchers tracked the lines of communications between different areas of the brain related to cognitive functions. The real acupuncture group showed a statistically significant increase in their cognitive brain functions after their treatments. The sham acupuncture group did not show any improvement in the cognitive-related areas of their brains.

The study showed that acupuncture is effective for improving cognitive functions in patients afflicted with MCI. Due to the low risk for side effects and the outstanding results of the study, the researchers recommended the use of acupuncture to improve cognition in MCI patients.

Source: Tan, T., Wang, D., Huang, J., Zhou, X., Yuan, X., Liang, J., ... Chen, S. (2017). Modulatory effects of acupuncture on brain networks in mild cognitive impairment patients. Neural Regeneration Research, 12(2), 250–258. <http://doi.org/10.4103/1673-5374.200808>

Challenge Your Brain

Keep your mind active and challenged. Brain function decreases with age. Studies show that cognitive exercise can improve blood flow to the brain. Spend at least 15 minutes each day on a mental exercise such as a crossword puzzle, journaling or learning a new language in order to slow memory loss.

However you choose to exercise your brain, acupuncture can help. Numerous studies suggest that acupuncture can help improve memory, mental clarity, concentration and cognitive function.

One recently published study showed how acupuncture can be used to help patients with vascular dementia. Cerebral functional imaging before and after acupuncture treatments showed a significant increase in the cerebral glucose metabolism of the brain, which is associated with improved cognitive function.

Other studies have looked at how acupuncture affects the performance of students taking an exam or those with Alzheimer's disease and memory impairment induced by diabetes and cerebral ischemia. All results, thus far, have been positive.
