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Revitalize Your Digestive Health with Acupuncture

Millions of Americans suffer from digestive disorders ranging from constipation, diarrhea and irritable bowel syndrome, to more serious conditions such as acid reflux (GERD), ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. Evidence that Oriental medicine has been used for digestive disorders can be found in early medical literature dating back to 3 AD, where specific acupuncture points and herbal formulas for borborygmus (rumbling or gurgling in the intestines), abdominal pain, and diarrhea with pain are discussed.



According to Oriental medical theory, most digestive disorders are due to disharmony in the spleen and stomach. The spleen plays a central part in the health and vitality of the body, taking a lead role in the assimilation of nutrients and maintenance of physical strength. It turns digested food from the stomach into usable nutrients and qi (energy). Many schools of thought have been formed around this organ, the premise being that the proper functioning of the "middle" is the key to all aspects of vitality.

By taking into account a person's constitution and varied symptoms, a treatment plan using a variety of techniques is designed specifically for the individual to bring their "middle" back into harmony and optimize the proper functioning of the digestive system.

Is your digestive system functioning at its best? Make an appointment today to see how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you!

Can Acupuncture Help Patients with Celiac Disease?

More than 3 million Americans are affected by celiac disease and up to 30 percent of the global population carries a genetic predisposition to it, according to the *American Gastroenterological Association*. In a nutshell, celiac disease is a severe allergy against the gluten proteins found in wheat. The immune system mounts an intense reaction, which causes inflammation in the small intestine. This damages the small finger-like projections that line the small intestine, and thus interferes with the small intestine's ability to absorb the nutrients the body needs to sustain itself.



Some people are asymptomatic and don't know they have celiac disease until after they experience serious complications. In fact, according to the Celiac Disease Foundation, as many as 97 percent of sufferers are not aware they have it. The person may have what's called non-celiac gluten sensitivity, in which they react negatively to gluten but do not suffer from intestinal inflammation. This makes diagnosis and getting treatment difficult.

Over time, if the condition is not diagnosed and goes untreated, it can become chronic and the person can find themselves dealing with long-term health conditions like anemia, miscarriage, neurological

complications, infertility, mineral and vitamin deficiency, lactose intolerance, cancer of the intestines and gastrointestinal tract, reduced spleen function, deficiency of the pancreas, and gall bladder malfunction.

Research maintains there is no cure except to refrain from eating foods with gluten. But gluten can be found in many foods that may not be apparently obvious, like salad dressings, soy sauce, and even some medications. Even when gluten-containing foods are removed from the diet, sometimes the intestinal inflammation and symptoms may persist. Relief from gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, weight loss, and acid reflux may take up to several months for some.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help manage the symptoms of celiac disease by addressing the inflammation in your intestines through regular treatments. Of vital importance is a discussion concerning diet and how to avoid gluten while still eating nutritious, complete meals.

One basic step you can take at home to support your digestive health is to establish a routine. According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the spleen is responsible for transforming food into nutrients and then transporting them to other areas of the body. Ritualize your eating habits with regular meal times, avoid hunger and don't overeat. Try to have your last meal at least three hours before going to bed. Breakfast is considered an important meal of the day and should not be skipped.

Optimizing Digestive System Function

Consider the idea that maintaining an optimal digestive system involves more than eating a healthy diet — it's just as vital to know why, when and how to eat as what we eat can either promote healing or cause damage to our digestive system.



Using the rhythm of the Oriental medicine circadian clock, based on 2-hour increments in which each organ performs at its best, you can plan your meals and snacks to help your entire body run well.

The large intestine functions best from 5 am to 7 am, which makes this the ideal time to eliminate waste from the body and provide the colon enough energy to function at full force. Immediately upon waking up, drink a glass of lukewarm or room temperature water to rehydrate the intestinal organs.

The time of the stomach is from 7 am to 9 am. As one of the first digestive organs to receive food, this is a perfect time to enjoy a good breakfast. Warm, cooked food is advisable as opposed to dry cereals with cold milk or smoothies. Both the stomach and spleen thrive on food that is warm.

Cold causes contraction, which interferes with their ability to digest food properly. A simple omelet, oatmeal, or warm, moist porridge can make for a filling, hearty meal. Try not to get too complicated with heavy sauces, spices or oily, fried foods. If you indulge in coffee or warm tea, wait until after you eat so your digestive juices remain undiluted and full of power.

The time of the heart is from 11 am to 1 pm. A healthy lunch can contain pungent and spicy foods as the energy of the heart hours can easily metabolize heat-producing foods. Consider swapping out cold salads and sandwiches for hot meals or warm soups.

Between the hours of 3 pm and 5 pm many people experience a slump in energy. This corresponds to the energy of the urinary bladder. During this time, the metabolic waste in the body is beginning to enter the kidneys for processing. To help initiate the kidney filtration process, enjoy a salty snack. A savory snack washed down with a warm herbal tea is a nice treat for your bladder and kidneys.

From 5 pm to 7 pm is the time of the kidneys. Kidney energy is about reserving and storing. The energy of the body is focusing inward as it begins to settle into the quietness of nighttime. A tranquil dinner focusing on whole grains, roasted meats, and legumes can satisfy the nutritional needs of the kidneys.

After dinner, keep calm and don't exert energy for the rest of the evening. This doesn't mean you have to forgo going out with friends but, it does mean it shouldn't be part of your regular routine. Parties and nighttime celebrations can be nurturing and joyful experiences, and they have their proper place.

Striving to eat in tempo with this circadian clock provides a structure for the whole day and helps to harmonize other aspects of your life.

Call to schedule an appointment today and learn more about how you can give your digestive health a tune up!

Meta Analysis Shows Oriental Medicine Controls IBD Symptoms

The ability of acupuncture and moxibustion to control symptoms of inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) was examined in a 2013 study called *Acupuncture and Moxibustion for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials*, which was published in the journal *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*.



Inflammatory bowel disease is a group of chronic diseases that inflame various parts of the digestive tract to produce symptoms of abdominal pain and diarrhea. Moxibustion is an Oriental medicine therapy in which smoke from the burning of the herb mugwort penetrates through the skin and into the body.

The meta-analysis compiled evidence from 7 major databases from all over the world. Researchers investigated 43 scientific studies. Ten of these studies compared the use of moxibustion with a popular pharmaceutical drug called sulphasalazine (oral SASP), which is used to address the irritation in the large intestine. The heat therapy produced statistically significant benefits for symptoms of IBD over the use of sulphasalazine.

The other trials also yielded results favoring the use of acupuncture to manage the pain and other symptoms of IBD. Researchers stated in their analysis of overall clinical efficacy that whether utilizing acupuncture alone, moxibustion alone, or a combination of the two, they all demonstrated superior results over the drug sulphasalazine for addressing symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease. Although this is a very promising conclusion, researchers also make clear the importance of future studies to further advance the use of acupuncture and moxibustion for inflammatory bowel disease.

Source: Ji, J., Lu, Y., Liu, H., Feng, H., Zhang, F., Wu, L., ... Wu, H. (2013). *Acupuncture and Moxibustion for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials*. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* : eCAM, 2013, 158352.
<http://doi.org/10.1155/2013/158352>

Find Relief from Irritable Bowel Syndrome

A common disorder affecting 10 to 20 percent of adults at some point in their lives, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or "spastic colon" is the end result of nervous interference with the normal function of the lower digestive tract. Women are 2-6 times more likely than men to develop IBS, and the American College of Gastroenterology suggests that women may be more sensitive to inflammation in the GI tract.



In general, irritable bowel syndrome involves alternating constipation and diarrhea with a noticeable and sustained increase or decrease in frequency of elimination. Those with IBS may experience fatigue, pain during stool elimination, cramping, nausea, bloating, gas, headaches, and backaches. These symptoms are variable, can appear in any combination, may change over time, and can be worsened by certain foods, stress and other irritants.

While other patterns may be present, irritable bowel syndrome is generally considered a disharmony between the liver and spleen meridians. The liver meridian is responsible for the smooth flow of qi and blood throughout the body. This flow can be upset by emotions or stress, causing stagnation of qi or blood. Oriental medicine views the spleen meridian as being associated with the function of digestion and

transforming food into energy (qi and blood). The spleen meridian can be weakened by a number of factors including overeating unhealthy foods, overwork, stress, fatigue, and lack of exercise. When the spleen meridian is weak and the liver meridian is not moving smoothly, the liver overacts on the spleen and can manifest as symptoms of IBS.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine support qi flow throughout the body, ensuring that all physiological and emotional processes run smoothly. Tension can result in a qi stagnation, irregular qi flow, uneven physical processes (including bowel movements) unpredictable flare ups, and uncomfortable or irregular bowel movements. For a healthy qi, focus on taking care of yourself and ask for help when needed. Treatment focuses on alleviating symptoms and correcting any underlying imbalances using a variety of Oriental medicine techniques including acupuncture, stress management, dietary changes, and exercise.

Acupuncture points can help relieve IBS symptoms, according to researchers from the University of York in the U.K., who found that integrating acupuncture into a treatment plan led to less severe symptoms. On the herbal front, patients receiving individualized TCM herbal formulas may experience the most benefit, according to an Australian study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Researchers in this study offered either standardized or customized formulas to patients with IBS. Patients receiving customized herbal formulas experienced fewer IBS symptoms, even after the treatment period had ended.

Sources:

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Nutrition for Optimal Digestive Health

Basic digestive issues often respond well to what is colloquially referred to as 'kitchen medicine.

Find delicious and nutritious ways to treat bloating, gas, diarrhea, constipation, and more by making a trip into your own kitchen.



Apple Cider Vinegar

Add a tablespoon of unfiltered, raw apple cider vinegar to a glass of warm water.

There is evidence that apple cider vinegar helps regulate blood sugar levels and may contribute to weight loss when combined with a low-calorie diet.

The important thing to remember is to drink this on an empty stomach. Drinking it before a meal can interfere with digestion and a glass too close to bedtime can irritate the esophagus.

According to the acupuncture and Oriental medicine theory, the sour taste delights the liver and helps it function at its best.

The liver is responsible for removing harmful substances from the bloodstream, producing bile, and is an important part of many metabolic processes.

An overworked liver may provoke bouts of diarrhea, heartburn, bloating, gas, and many uncomfortable problems related to digestion.

Fermented Foods

Include fermented foods like sauerkraut, kombucha, kimchi, kefir, and yogurt in your diet. They are rich in nutrition and come in a variety of tastes and forms.

Eating these types of foods help your body metabolize, extract, and absorb nutrients easier as the fermentation process involves the breakdown of food by yeast, bacteria or other microorganisms.

Probiotics

Pickle fibrous vegetables such as cauliflower, onions, cucumber, or cabbage at home.

The ultimate product is chock full of probiotics — microorganisms that provide health benefits for the digestive system and enhance immunity.

Simply add salt to water to make a brine and add the veggies in a sterilized jar. For extra flavor, mix in a small quantity of apple cider vinegar, mustard seeds, or a bay leaf.

Burp the jar every day by opening it up to let out excess gas produced during the fermentation process. Wait 2 or 3 days, and soon you'll have tasty condiments that support your intestinal flora.

Pectin

Problems with constipation? Pectin, the fiber naturally occurring in apples, adds bulk to the stool to help keep things moving.

The more efficient, regular, and complete a bowel movement is, the less chance there is for infection and inflammation to occur in the intestines.

Have an apple to unblock stagnation in the large intestine. Eating an apple on an empty stomach is an excellent way to handle a bout of constipation and ensure regular evacuations.

Honey

For children over 1, a tablespoon of honey is a delicate, yet effective way to promote bowel movements as it helps moisten the intestines and dissolve stagnation.

Ginger

Ginger has been found to increase the secretion of gastric juice. In fact, ginger can be used for most digestive upsets that involve nausea, vomiting, cramping, abdominal pain, indigestion or diarrhea.

This means that food is digested more quickly, creating an unfriendly environment for bacteria that could wreak havoc with your stomach and intestines.

Mint

Mint is a versatile herb that has a cooling nature. Fresh mint leaves can be made into a tea to ease digestive symptoms such as pain, bloating, gas, borborygmus, acid reflux, and bad breath.

If you've eaten a spicy meal or one that was just a little too oily, you can stave off any potential digestive problems by enjoying a cup of warm mint tea after your meal.

On hot summer days, try sipping mint tea in the shade to get your body to cool down. In colder months, add a little bit of fresh ginger, which is warming in nature.

Ginger balances out the coolness of the mint, and this combination provides a double whammy of nutritional benefits for your stomach.

Both herbs are renowned for their ability to aid in digestion and combat nausea and are gentle enough that pregnant women can safely consume them.

