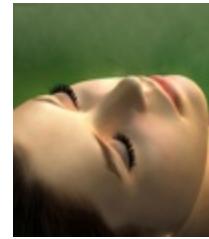


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## Sleep Disorders? Acupuncture Can Help

Sleep disorders occur when difficulties and complications interfere with the quality and length of sleep. One reason why it is so important to consistently have a proper night's sleep is because without it, other medical issues may worsen. Even a single restless night can leave one feeling mentally, emotionally and physically exhausted. While a complete catalogue of sleep disorders is long and varied, some of the most common ones that respond well to treatment with acupuncture and Oriental medicine are insomnia, sleep apnea, jet lag disorder, snoring, night terrors, narcolepsy and restless leg syndrome (RLS).



According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the cycles of sleeping and waking demonstrate the dynamic interplay of yin and yang forces. Yin qualities include contraction, cold, inactivity and nighttime. Yang qualities are represented by expansion, heat, activity and daytime. During sleep and states of relaxation, yin exercises the dominant force. After yin energy has refreshed the body and mind, it is then time for yang energy to increase. When yang springs into action, it is now possible to wake up restored and ready for the day.

One way in which a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine may help a patient regain control of their sleep is by balancing the body's internal forces of yin and yang through the use of acupuncture. For example, if a disharmony is discovered in the Yang Qiao channel, manifesting as an overabundance of yang energy, and since this energy is always active, it would be appropriate to decrease yang and increase yin. This can help alleviate symptoms of certain sleep disorders, such as insomnia. A channel is an invisible pathway on which energy is necessary for healing flows. The Yang Qiao channel has traditionally been used to address sleep pathologies.

However, in some cases, there is also an emotional component that must be addressed. A study entitled "Acupuncture Increases Nocturnal Secretion and Reduces Insomnia and Anxiety: A Preliminary Report", printed in the 2004 edition of the *Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, yielded some very encouraging conclusions. The test subjects, all of whom complained of insomnia and anxiety, received regular acupuncture treatments for a total of five weeks.

Melatonin is a hormone produced in the pineal gland that controls the waking and sleeping cycles. It was documented that the patients' nightly levels of melatonin production increased, which, in turn, caused a rise in the amount of time spent dozing. This also resulted in a better quality of sleep than before the treatments began. At the same time the length and quality of sleep improved, there was a significant reduction in their levels of anxiety. This led the researchers to conclude that acupuncture is a valuable and effective treatment for certain kinds of insomnia.

**If you can't seem to get a good night's sleep call today to see what acupuncture and Oriental medicine can do for you!**

## **Put Insomnia to Rest**

Anyone who has ever had a restless night in bed, spent hours looking at the clock or counting sheep, can legitimately complain of insomnia. Sometimes it happens for obvious reasons, and other times we're at a loss to explain why. According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, an imbalance of the heart organ often plays a role when it comes to disturbances and interruptions of our sleep. It might sound strange to link the heart with insomnia, but the following will help explain.

It is believed that the shen, also called spirit or mind, lives in the heart and returns there to rest every night while we sleep. The concept of shen refers to the cognitive functions, mental health and the overall vitality of a person. The spirit finds sanctuary and rejuvenation in a healthy heart when the emotions and the physical body are equanimous. This ensures an undisturbed, good night's rest. However, when the shen is 'disturbed', it cannot find its way home and is said to wander. When this is the case, symptoms of insomnia may arise.

There are many reasons why the shen may be forced to wander. The heart is a delicate organ that is vulnerable to pathological heat. An example of a condition involving the heart 'being harassed' by heat, is called heart yin deficiency. Yin is a cooling, quiet, feminine energy. It is likened to the hidden world of the yet-to-sprout seed, or the unborn baby still in the womb. As heart yin lessens and dries up, it leaves room for yang to take advantage and expand. Yang being a moving, active, masculine force, will create a condition of excess heat in the heart. This makes the heart inhospitable to the spirit.

There will usually be a manifestation of other symptoms confirming a case of insomnia due to heart yin deficiency. These signs and symptoms may include anxiety, mental agitation, poor memory, night sweats and a dry mouth. It is interesting to note that this patient may be able to fall asleep without a problem, but will wake up frequently in the middle of the night. In this case, a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine may need to build up and nourish yin in an effort to cool down the heart.

**If you wake up and still don't feel refreshed or you never seem to fall into a nice, deep sleep, call today to see what acupuncture and Oriental medicine can do for you!**

## **Suffering from Hypersomnia? Acupuncture Can Help**

Hypersomnia literally means excessive sleep. It can manifest as daytime drowsiness, even after a long night's rest. The desire to doze during daylight hours can be so overpowering that a person may literally fall asleep anywhere, under any circumstance. It may even happen while someone is driving, making it a dangerous condition. The flagship symptoms of hypersomnia, also called hypersomnolence, are strong urges to nap during the day, longer than normal nightly sleep times and an inability to feel refreshed after sleeping.

The consequences of hypersomnia can result in a myriad of symptoms including irritability, problems with memory, impaired thinking, slow speech, depression, loss of appetite, decreased vitality and energy levels, and, in extreme cases, hallucinations.

The theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine provides many reasons why sleep and wake cycles may be disturbed. In the case of hypersomnia, the source of the problem may rest with the liver organ and the blood flow. A few lifestyle suggestions that can help keep your liver healthy include refraining from angry outbursts.

Uncontrolled anger damages the liver and easily leads to an increase in heat. Maintaining equanimity through careful thought before saying or doing anything is vital.

Gentle exercise is another way to maintain good liver health. A good walk after a meal will encourage a robust blood flow to aid digestion. Stretching is another way to encourage blood flow. Try standing on your tip toes and reaching your hands as high in the air as they will go.

Sometimes it's not what you do, but what you don't do that counts. In this case, avoiding alcohol, or drinking only in moderation, is a good idea. The liver metabolizes alcohol, so the less of it one consumes, the more energy and vitality are preserved.

Hypersomnia can result from neurological diseases, head trauma, substance abuse, side effects from prescription drugs and sleep deprivation. Narcolepsy is a neurological disorder that is very similar to hypersomnia, but is considered more severe in its symptoms.

**If you find yourself spending too much time sleeping in bed or napping on the couch, without ever feeling ready for the day, call today to discuss your concerns.**

## Nutrients to Ensure a Restful Night

One important way we can help ensure a restful night is by making wise decisions during the day when it comes to our diet. Eating foods and drinking teas with nutrients beneficial to our sleep cycle can be quite simple. Even minor changes in diet can lead to major changes in the quality and duration of sleep.



With this in mind, before heading to the bedroom for some shut-eye, let's first head to the kitchen. A good way to start is to look for foods that contain protein. No matter what the source of protein is, chances are good that it contains tryptophan. Tryptophan is an amino acid the body utilizes to create vitamin B6. In turn, vitamin B6 triggers the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter that is a precursor to melatonin.

Melatonin is a very important hormone when it comes to regulating sleeping and waking cycles. It has the ability to balance our circadian rhythms, which are our natural response to being awake when it's light and being sleepy when it's dark outside. To simplify things, rather than remembering the lengthy chain reaction that occurs when you eat foods with tryptophan, just think protein for a good night's rest. Foods with high amounts of tryptophan include turkey, lamb, beef, chicken, port, nuts, seeds, cheese, tuna, crab, bananas, hazelnuts, spinach, sweet potatoes and garlic.

If you prefer to drink your way to a better night's sleep, teas are also an easy, nutritious option. During the day it's fine to sip tea that is room temperature or cold, but in the evening, when it's closer to bedtime, a cup served warm is best. The heat provides comfort that helps the stomach and the whole body relax. Herbs known for their ability to help bring on relaxation and a peaceful sleep include chamomile, lavender, peppermint and lemon balm.

Not only is including a small, warm cup of tea in your bedtime ritual helpful for sleep, but drinking 1-3 cups during the day can also provide nighttime benefits. Just make sure to have half a cup if you prefer some tea right before going to bed. You'll still get the benefits but avoid waking up in the middle night to use the bathroom. Having a caffeinated beverage is fine, if a moderate amount is consumed in the morning. This is because the effects of caffeine may stay in the system for up to eight hours, so best to drink it only as part of a morning ritual.

**If you would like to explore dietary recommendations that target your specific sleep issues in greater depth, call today to learn more about nutrition for a peaceful night's rest.**

## Exercises to Enhance Sleep Quality

You might not normally associate the words "sleep" and "exercise" with each other, as they each represent opposite states of being. From the perspective of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, sleep and exercise are perfect illustrations of yin and yang.



Sleep is a yin activity as it is quiet, passive and, at the same time, a rejuvenating state. Exercise and being awake, in general, is an active, warm and energetic state. When the forces of yin and yang are in harmony, a person can sleep well, and when awake, have adequate energy for exercise.

Exercises that enhance sleep quality can be utilized in two different ways:

One way is to engage in moderate to rigorous physical activity during the day to increase the chances for a well-earned, deep sleep. The second way is performing exercises at or close to bedtime to encourage a restful night.

If you experience trouble falling asleep or have a hard time staying asleep for the duration of the night, a combination of the following exercises may prove helpful.

The best time to engage in strenuous activity is the morning or early afternoon. Too much exercise in the late afternoon or evening may stimulate the body, leading to a delay in bedtime.

Almost any aerobic activity you can think of is appropriate, as long as it is done consistently for at least 10 minutes. This includes walking, running, biking, swimming, tennis, dancing and more.

The exercises performed during your bedtime ritual, to help you prepare for sleep, are of a different nature. The first thing you can do is soak your feet in warm water for 10 minutes.

Adding 10 drops of lavender oil, another calming oil, or a tablespoon of Epsom salts is a nice luxury, but not necessary. Doing this prepares you for the next step.

Sit comfortably and massage each foot for a couple of minutes, especially the bottom of the foot and between the toes. According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, specific areas of the feet correlate to different organs.

When pressure is applied through pressing or massaging, the corresponding organ directly benefits. Not only do your feet receive special treatment, but your whole body as well.

Next, find a cozy spot near a wall to lie down on your back. Raise your legs in the air and rest them on the wall. Your body should be in the form of the letter L.

Then, stretch your arms out to the sides, at the level of your shoulders. Hang out in this pose for 3 or 4 minutes. Experiment with wiggling your toes for 30 seconds or so, and then relaxing them. Or, try slowly bending and stretching your knees up to 5 times.

The purpose of this exercise is to give yourself a break from gravity. Most of the day is spent in an upright position, whether sitting or moving. Performing these movements takes pressure off your muscles and encourages a state of relaxation.

For the next exercise, lie on your back in bed and make sure you feel snug and warm. Close your eyes, take a couple of deep breaths and bring awareness to your feet. Start by wiggling your toes. Then, spend a few seconds concentrating on each body part.

Move methodically and at a pace that does not leave you bored. Try to include major areas like ankles, knees, hips, belly, solar plexus, shoulders, hands, neck and jaw.

These areas are prone to physical and emotional stress, so you may feel tension there. If you come across any problem areas, you can rub your hands together to generate heat and place your warm hands on the afflicted part.

