



Tai-Nan Wang L.Ac., O.M.D.

4295 Gesner Street, Suite 1A  
San Diego, CA 92117  
619-684-1848

### **Treating Diabetes with Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine**

It is estimated that 25.8 million men, women, and children in the United States have diabetes. Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the risk for death is approximately twice that of persons of similar age without diabetes.



The cause of diabetes continues to be a mystery, although both genetics and environmental factors such as obesity and lack of exercise appear to play roles. Complications of diabetes include heart disease, hypertension, eye problems, kidney disease, nervous system disease, periodontal disease, amputation, fatigue, depression, and complications during pregnancy.

In order to manage diabetes, it is essential for people to make healthy lifestyle choices in diet, exercise, and other health habits. Another important factor when treating diabetes is creating a support team of health care professionals. This support team may include your primary doctor, an eye doctor, nurses, a dietitian, and a licensed acupuncturist.

Acupuncture and herbal medicine have been used to treat diabetes for over 2000 years. A patient with "Xiao Ke" or wasting and thirsting disease (the Traditional Chinese medical term for diabetes) is discussed in detail in the Nei Jing, a classic Chinese medical book written about 2,500 years ago. The patient is described as having symptoms of excessive hunger and thirst, frequent urination and rapid weight loss; all symptoms of diabetes.

#### **Diabetes According to Traditional Chinese Medicine**

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, diabetes is caused by an imbalance of the cyclical flow of Qi within the meridians and organ systems.

This particular imbalance produces heat that depletes the body's fluids and Qi causing symptoms such as:

- Fatigue
- Lethargy
- Unexplained Weight Loss
- Excessive Thirst (Polydipsia)
- Excessive Urination (Polyuria)
- Excessive Eating (Polyphagia)
- Poor Wound Healing
- Infections
- Irritability
- Blurry Vision

## **How Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Treats Diabetes**

In treating diabetes, Oriental medicine offers a way to address each patient individually to eliminate the symptoms associated with diabetes and reduce the need for insulin. The practitioner may choose to use a variety of techniques during treatment including acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, bodywork, lifestyle/dietary recommendations and energetic exercises. The treatment for diabetes will focus on regulating the circulation of blood and Qi and balancing the organ systems to improve pancreatic function and address internal heat and the depletion of fluids.

### **Acupuncture**

The acupuncture points used to treat diabetes are all over the body and on several meridians. A point on the back, called 'Yishu' (located on the back, lateral to thoracic vertebrae 8) is often used and has proven effective in recent studies published by the Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine for controlling the function of the pancreas and blood sugar levels in diabetic patients.

### **Chinese Herbal Medicine**

Herbal medicine is an important component to the treatment of diabetes. Different formulas may be effective for different people, so practitioners may try several different approaches. Commonly used Chinese herbal formulas are Liu Wei Di Huang and Da Bu Yin Wan. Studies have shown that American ginseng can improve glucose tolerance and is often added to herbal formulas. Other herbs are added to an herbal formula to treat complications of diabetes such as peripheral neuropathy and blurry vision.

### **Should I try Acupuncture for Diabetes?**

When treating diabetes, acupuncture and Oriental medicine can assist the body to regain its normal healthy functioning. Add acupuncture and Chinese medicine to your arsenal when fighting diabetes!

**Call today to find out how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you!**

## **Get Relief from Diabetes-Related Nerve Damage**

The most common type of nerve damage afflicting diabetes mellitus patients is called peripheral neuropathy. Although many things can cause peripheral nerve damage, such as injuries, infections and environmental toxins, when it occurs in a diabetic patient, it is due to high levels of sugar in the bloodstream.

Neuropathy is defined as an abnormal state of the nervous system. The word Mellitus is a Latin word meaning sweet. Sweet blood may not sound like a bad thing but, in reality, it is a medical problem that can produce serious consequences. Nerve damage typically starts at the feet and legs and then progresses to the hands and arms. The most common symptoms of peripheral neuropathy affecting these parts of the body are:

- Numb, tingling, burning or painful sensations
- Inability to sense temperature changes
- Ultrasensitive to the point where light clothing and bedsheets can cause pain
- Muscle weakness
- Diminished reflexes
- Lack of balance and coordination
- Ulcers and serious infections, especially on the feet

These symptoms manifest due to high amounts of glucose circulating in the bloodstream eroding away the fine network of nerves. Nerves are delicate structures that send messages between the brain and other parts of the body. For example, a sensory nerve in the finger will transmit a signal to the brain when it

touches something very hot. In turn, the brain will relay back a message to quickly remove the finger. However, a patient suffering from diabetic peripheral neuropathy may not register the sensation of hot, or not have the proper reflexes or coordination to remove their fingers from danger.

According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, symptoms of diabetic peripheral neuropathy may result from a spleen deficiency. The spleen organ plays a key role in digestion because it is responsible for extracting valuable nutrients from food. It separates the precious substances from the heavy, turbid portion and sends each to the appropriate place. In this way, food is transformed and transported to nourish the whole body. However, when the spleen fails in its function to transform, dampness may occur.

Dampness is the pathological buildup of viscous fluids. Sometimes it is visible, as in the case of a runny nose, and other times it is deep within the body. An overweight person may suffer from a damp condition and therefore finds it difficult to lose weight. The keywords describing dampness are heavy and sluggish, the opposite of what body fluids should be. Ingesting too much sugar, fats, and fried foods can injure the spleen and lead to a condition of internal dampness.

When a deficient spleen results in an accumulation of dampness, the peripheral nerves may be stifled and prevented from functioning properly. In order to help restore these functions, it is necessary to receive acupuncture treatments that drain dampness. Certain modifications to the diet may be recommended as well as regular acupuncture treatments.

The use of an acupuncture point located on the spleen channel, called 'Yin Mound Spring', is ideal for helping the body drain dampness. When 'Yin Mound Spring' is needled by your practitioner, the harmful buildup of fluids will start to be eliminated, usually via the urinary system. As the blockages impinging on the peripheral nerves abate, symptoms of peripheral neuropathy will also abate.

To further support the process of draining dampness, simple diet changes may help. Eating at regular times and avoiding overeating are excellent ways to start. When sugar cravings strike, consider a dessert made from sweet potatoes or yams. Either bake or boil these sweet tubers and experiment by adding garnishes such as a drizzle of honey, chopped nuts, or dried fruits. Serving them warm makes it even easier for the spleen to digest.

If you have been diagnosed with diabetic peripheral neuropathy or currently have a diabetic condition and notice strange symptoms occurring in your extremities (i.e. hands, feet, arms, and legs), contact a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine near you today!

**About the Author:** Vanessa Vogel Batt, L.Ac., MSTOM, studied at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, and practiced acupuncture and Oriental medicine in New York for several years. Vanessa enjoys traveling the world, and has published articles on acupuncture and Oriental medicine and related health topics for websites and publications in both the U.S. and abroad.

## Manage Glucose with an Oriental Medicine Diet

While a sweet taste delights our taste buds, overindulgence can cause or worsen digestive problems and upset our metabolic and emotional balance. According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, when one or more of the organs responsible for digestion no longer functions properly, it potentially puts the other organs of the body in danger. There is even an entire philosophy of medical treatment based on this belief called the School of the Stomach and Spleen.

The brilliant acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) physician, Li Dong-Yuan lived, who during the Jin Dynasty in China, from 1180-1251, wrote his masterpiece, Pi Wei Lun (Treatise on the Stomach and Spleen) during a time of rampant epidemics. In his desire to heal his people, Dong-Yuan discovered the significance of a healthy digestive system. This old saying that originates from ancient China helps to summarize Dong-Yuan's philosophy: 'When the spleen is healthy it can generate all living things. If it becomes depleted, it can bring about the 100 diseases.'

Diabetes is one example of a disease that has a variety of health consequences which can sometimes result from a faulty digestive system. The onset of type 2 diabetes, also known as insulin-resistant diabetes, frequently affects the overweight adult population, although one may still suffer from the disease while being

a normal weight.

According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, after taking a bite and swallowing your food, the stomach receives it and proceeds to 'cook,' 'steam' or 'ferment' it. The stomach is known as 'the sea of grain and water.' The 'cooking' extracts vital nutrients from the 'grain' and passes them on to the spleen for further processing. The spleen then distributes the nutrients accordingly throughout the body. Diet is significant for maintaining health or restoring it and can help stabilize blood glucose levels and curb sweet cravings by following dietary recommendations.

Foods which represent the sweet flavor aid the stomach and spleen. It may surprise some to learn that acupuncture and Oriental medicine consider meats such as pork and chicken as sweet. Vegetables such as yams, sweet potatoes, corn, snow peas, squash, and even turnips are also considered sweet. If you wish to reduce your consumption of sweet foods and to curb your sweet tooth, eating a savory dish made with coconut milk can ease the need for a dessert afterward.

Anything heavily processed, greasy or high in sugar can injure the spleen and cause a condition known as internal phlegm. This disorder represents a turbid, heavy condition interfering with digestion and can cause belching, bloating, pain and diarrhea.

If you are following a diabetic diet, even fruits are recommended only in moderate amounts due to their relatively high sugar content. Try pairing your fruit with a high-fiber grain like oatmeal. The fiber will slow down digestion and help keep blood sugar levels stable. Or you could consider a moderately sweet dessert comprised of a yam with butter and cinnamon. By following acupuncture and Oriental medicine guidelines for properties of food, you can easily find lower-sugar foods that are allowed, yet still provide a sweet flavor and can replace unhealthy desserts.

Contact an acupuncture practitioner near you to find out more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help enhance your health!

Read more about acupuncture and Oriental medicine for Diabetes!

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## Treatment for Diabetes Related Skin Conditions

Often the first sign of adult onset diabetes, or Type 2 diabetes, is the exacerbation of a pre-existing skin condition, or the appearance of a new one. Damage to the nerves and blood vessels impairs the body's ability to fight infection. When diabetes goes unchecked, not only do the chances of incurring fungal and bacterial infections increase, but the severity increases as well.

There are a variety of skin conditions that specifically afflict diabetes patients. Here are a few:

- *Acanthosis nigricans*  
raised and brownish patches
- *Diabetic dermopathy*  
small round bumps on the shins
- *Necrobiosis lipoidica diabetorum* - granular skin lesions
- *Eruptive xanthomatosis*  
small, roundish pink papules
- *Disseminated granuloma annulare* - small bumpy lesions

According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the skin and large intestine have a unique relationship. The health of the large intestine can be observed by the condition of the skin. One purpose of this internal organ is to absorb fluids and excrete wastes. Sometimes unusable or toxic material gets stuck and starts to putrefy, instead of completely exiting the body via the colon.

Although heat and toxins are normally released through the sweat glands, an overload of waste products can undermine this function and tell-tale symptoms of abnormal skin conditions may manifest. Depending on

the type of infection or condition, the skin may react by producing heat, swelling, redness, itchiness, dry patches, or pus-filled sores.

For the patient with itchy, red, and painful sores on top of the foot, treatments may include the use of *Quchi*, a versatile acupuncture point used to clear heat and assist in healing sores or reducing fever.

To reinforce acupuncture treatment results, lifestyle and dietary changes may be recommended. Foods that can support large intestine and subsequently skin health include yams, pumpkins, string beans, celery, and turnips. Fruits and vegetables high in fiber will help keep food moving in the digestive tract. It's when food remains undigested in the large intestine that pathogens and toxins may accumulate.

Drinking water periodically throughout the day will help the intestines stay lubricated. Warm tea can be especially soothing after eating a meal. Diabetics may want to consider eating smaller meals at more frequent intervals. Avoiding fatty, greasy or fried foods can prevent the large intestine from becoming overburdened.

## Managing Diabetes with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

Diabetes is a complex disease which challenges the body in many ways. Explained in the simplest terms, diabetes is a metabolic disease that prevents your body from using sugar properly, causing blood sugar levels to remain high. A normal pancreas produces sufficient amounts of the hormone insulin, which is responsible for helping glucose, or blood sugar, to enter into cells. It is in this way that your body's cells receive the energy necessary to sustain life. When this process is blocked due to a deficiency of the pancreas or other reason, diabetes ensues bringing a host of signs and symptoms. Some common signs and symptoms of diabetes include frequent urination, excessive thirst, excessive eating, extreme fatigue, slow healing of cuts and wounds, infections, irritability, tingling or numbness in the extremities, and blurry vision.



According to the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in 4 people remain unaware that they live with diabetes. Sometimes the body will give warning signs that help your physician or acupuncture and Oriental medicine practitioner make an early diagnosis. It is important to get a diagnosis as soon as you suspect that diabetes may be a problem for you, as untreated diabetes affects the whole body and can lead to the following medical problems, including heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, peripheral neuropathy, digestive disorders, and periodontal disease.

The most common types of diabetes are Type 1, Type 2 and gestational diabetes. Type 1 diabetes is also known as insulin-dependent diabetes and usually presents in childhood. In this case, the body doesn't produce any of its own insulin and must permanently rely on medication. Approximately 10 percent of diabetics are Type 1. Type 2 diabetes often arises in adulthood and is also called insulin-resistant diabetes. In some cases, the pancreas remains capable of producing insulin but the uptake into the cells remains slow and inefficient. About 90 percent of diabetes patients have Type 2. Gestational diabetes occurs solely during a woman's pregnancy. Usually it resolves after she gives birth, but it may leave her more vulnerable to develop Type 2 diabetes.

Offering a holistic approach that is beneficial in the treatment of such complicated diseases like diabetes, Acupuncture and Oriental medicine provides a treatment plan specifically tailored to the needs of each individual to provide relief of the symptoms associated with diabetes. That being said, the fundamental problem that is common among most diabetic patients arises from a long-standing deficiency of yin.

### Managing Yin and Yang in Diabetes

Yin refers to the qualities of nurturing, cooling and supporting. It is represented by the feminine aspects such as the moon, night-time, and winter. Yin is the natural complement to yang. Yang is an active, warming force represented by masculine qualities such as the sun, daytime, and summer. Both yin and yang metaphorically represent the two forces of constant change occurring in all things, at all times. When you engage in a yang activity, such as running, eventually the yin principles of contraction and rest take hold and you either take a rest or your body collapses.

For diabetic patients, yang is represented by heat and dryness, which consumes the moisturizing and cooling yin. This dynamic particularly affects the lungs, stomach, spleen, and kidneys, which, with the exception of the stomach, are yin organs. Yin organs primarily store, produce and transform vital substances such as qi (energy), blood and body fluids. The yang organs primarily provide nutrients for the body. Some yang organs include the small and large intestines and the bladder. When lung yin consumption occurs, it can cause extreme thirst. Stomach yin consumption results in extreme hunger, while kidney yin consumption yields abundant, excess urination. Heat is generated internally due to many things. Contributing factors include emotional stress, overworking and poor diet.

Poor diet includes the eating of low-quality food and irregular mealtimes. This greatly impacts the spleen and stomach whose element is the earth and finds great comfort in regularity and ritual. This means your body digests best when consuming nutritious foods at regular times. Nutritious food does not include fatty, sugary or greasy items. Nor does it include alcohol, caffeine or very hot drinks as these tend to dry up yin. Where there is a deficit of yin, there is likely a yang excess.

Approximately 85 percent of diabetic patients are overweight and 30 percent of the overall overweight population suffers from diabetes. This indicates the importance of maintaining a safe weight through healthy eating and exercise. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you reduce your weight through regular acupuncture treatments and dietary recommendations.

In the meantime, if you feel concerned about being overweight or if you experience sweet cravings, try following the advice of two Chinese proverbs regarding weight management.

Better to go 3 days without eating than go 1 day without tea.

Although it is not being suggested that one must fast, the emphasis of this proverb is on the importance of warm tea. Green tea or a non-caffeinated tea taken after each meal can help your spleen and stomach perform their digestive functions better. Green tea especially helps break down fat so that it may be processed and eliminated more quickly. There is evidence that it helps stabilize blood sugar and reduce high cholesterol levels.

100 paces after each meal will allow one to live a healthy 100 years.

This reveals the importance of light exercise after eating. A short walk after each meal can start the 'digestive fire' necessary for proper digestion. The spleen is responsible for the transforming and transporting of valuable nutrients for the whole body. When this function falters, bloating and discomfort may occur after eating. The diabetic patient is more prone to suffer these consequences, so a light walk and a warm (not hot) cup of green tea after meals is a good practice to help support your spleen.

Whether you are diagnosed with diabetes or feel you may be in danger of developing it, acupuncture and Oriental medicine offers an opportunity to help manage your symptoms.

Contact a practitioner near you to learn more!

Learn more about acupuncture and Oriental medicine for diabetes and related conditions.

