



Getting the Point

The Women's Clinic @ Uxbridge Newsletter

Summer 2004

Summer may be finally here, and we hope you're enjoying some sunshine! If hot weather and light mornings are interfering with your sleep, we've included some useful tips in this issue. There's also some advice for hayfever sufferers.

Be careful not to overdo the ice creams, lollies and cold drinks. Although they are tempting in the hot weather, chilled food and drink put a strain on our digestive systems, which need heat, not cold, to process our food. It's better to keep drinking water in small quantities throughout the day, avoiding getting to the point when you're gasping for a cold drink.



When you're sunbathing, be careful about exposure to the sun. To avoid the possibility of aching joints later, take something to lie on. Carry a long sleeved top – useful not just for covering up against the sun, but to avoid catching a chill when you go into those air-conditioned super-markets or bars after a day in the sun. Enjoy the summer!

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A Lifestyle Change for Summer

We spend one third of our lives sleeping. However, we probably give little thought to the position in which we sleep. In Oriental Medicine, the position we adopt when asleep can be a useful means of diagnosing imbalances in the system.

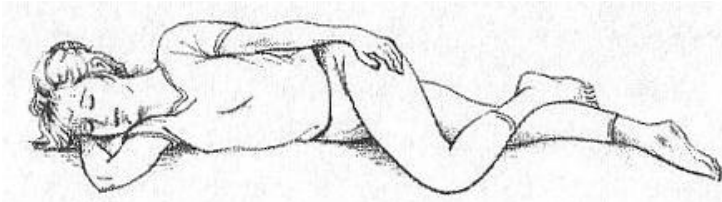
Summer, the time of the Fire Element, is a good time to cultivate the Shen, which governs sleep. One way to do this is to improve your sleeping position. It may seem strange that there are postures for sleeping. Good posture when we are sleeping is as important as good posture when we are carrying out our daily activities!

A traditional sleeping position is illustrated on the next page. Lie on the right side, with the right leg straight and supporting the bent left leg. Place the right hand under the head, and rest the left hand on the left thigh.

This position allows the body's Qi to flow freely. The Heart, in the highest position, is not constricted. The Liver, which in Oriental theory stores the blood, is in a lower position and can receive more blood. The Stomach is in a position that facilitates the downward movement of food.

It may be challenging to alter your sleeping position. It is worthwhile persevering, as the proper sleeping posture will ultimately pay off in improved sleep, and – in the long run – much better health.

To Sleep...



Courtesy of A. Hicks. Used with permission

Good sleep can be characterised as seven to eight hours of sound, uninterrupted sleep, with a moderate amount of dreaming. A good sleeper gets to sleep easily, gets back to sleep easily if disturbed, and feels refreshed and energised in the morning. To sleep well is a blessing, and good sleep is becoming increasingly rare in our fast-paced society.

Poor sleep may be the result of the pathological condition called insomnia, or it may be due to external or temporary causes. These include such things as sudden changes in weather, sleeping in a room that is too hot or too cold, drinking too many caffeine rich beverages (such as tea, coffee, and some soft drinks), or temporary emotional upsets and worry. Adjusting these circumstances can often improve the quality of sleep. If these changes are made and sleep doesn't improve, then it is a strong indication that insomnia is the problem.

In Chinese medicine, conditions that can cause insomnia include overexertion and worry. Overwork and emotions such as anger, frustration, resentment and irritation can also affect sleep. Irregular eating, over-eating, or eating too much hot or greasy food also contribute to insomnia.

Women can be particularly vulnerable to this condition. Blood loss during periods and childbirth can lead to energy imbalances that result in chronic poor sleep and excessive dreaming.

Happily, acupuncture and herbal treatment can both be very effective in treating insomnia. If you are sleeping less well than you could be, try making the changes suggested below. If the quality of your sleep does not improve, then it would be a good idea to see your practitioner for appropriate treatment.

To improve your sleep:

- Try to go to bed in a relaxed state, and avoid going to bed when you are excited, nervous or overstimulated.
- Go to bed at a regular time each night, even if you don't fall asleep immediately.
- Reduce or eliminate caffeine-based drinks such as coffee, tea, cola and other caffeine rich soft drinks. Alcohol can also disrupt sleep in some people.
- Avoid engaging in stimulating activities before going to bed. These include watching television, reading exciting books, vigorous activity, or working late.
- Don't eat late at night – it's a good practice to allow three hours between your evening meal and bedtime.
- Relax before going to bed – relax, meditate, or do QiGong exercises.
- Massage your feet to help bring excess energy from the head to the feet. This calms the Qi and encourages sleep.

... Perchance to Dream

Dreaming is a normal, healthy process. Everybody dreams, even if they don't remember their dreams. In Chinese medicine, some types of dreaming can indicate a pathological imbalance.

Nightmares and recurring bad dreams are obvious indicators of imbalance, as are sleepwalking, waking up screaming, and talking in one's sleep. Chinese Medicine also recognises a condition called "excessive" dreaming. These are dreams that cause restless sleep, and the person feeling very tired the following morning.

So what, then, is "normal" dreaming? This is dreaming that does not lead to restless sleep, is not frightening and does not disturb the mind the next day. It also does not leave you feeling tired in the morning.

If dreams are disturbing your sleep and making you feel tired, discuss this with your practitioner. And remember that if you suffer from nightmares, or outer body experiences, these can be addressed through acupuncture treatment.

Sweet dreams!

Anxiety & Depression

You may have seen articles in the press recently about acupuncture being effective in the treatment of anxiety and depression. Both are very distressing conditions, which may occur for no apparent reason. Each person suffering from anxiety or depression will experience it differently. Chinese medicine is a complex and subtle system which enables us, by paying close attention to the patient's experience, to identify which aspects of the system are involved, and design the best acupuncture treatment for each individual.

In Chinese medicine, anxiety is linked to the Heart and Kidney energy. Anxiety may be accompanied by unpleasant feelings such as agitation, panic and hysteria. These confirm that the Heart energy is out of balance. Kidney involvement is indicated by feelings of apprehension, while irritability and indecision indicate imbalances in Liver and Gallbladder energy. Anxiety is often accompanied by distressing physical symptoms such as insomnia, palpitations, hypertension, cold extremities, urinary frequency, loose bowels, headaches and tense shoulders. Again, these symptoms enable us to identify the contributory factors and target them in treatment.

Similarly with depression, Chinese medicine enables us to differentiate the underlying causes, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach to treatment. Depression may be associated with deficiency in one or more aspects of our energy, or with stagnation, or with a combination of deficiency and stagnation.

For example, deficient Wood or Liver energy may manifest as self-doubt, lack of confidence and weak boundaries, while stagnation of Liver energy may manifest as depression with feelings of frustration, with a desire to act but feeling being blocked and unclear how to move forward.

Depression and anxiety can affect people with varying degrees of severity. If you are taking prescribed medication, acupuncture can still be of benefit, and it is worth talking to an acupuncturist about how treatment can help you.

Reactions to Treatment

After an acupuncture treatment many things may occur.

If the treatment was constitutional, rather than for pain relief, you may feel quite relaxed, or even tired and drowsy. In this case, do try to rest and let the treatment take its full effect.

You may experience a boost of energy. In this case, just enjoy it rather than deciding to run a marathon or redecorate your house!

You may find that past conditions recur. This is usually very transitory, lasting only for a day or two and is a good sign. Or, your symptoms may remain the same while you observe that you feel "better in yourself".

Always be sure to carefully observe any changes you feel in yourself after treatment, and discuss these with your practitioner at your next appointment. If you experience anything that is cause for alarm, contact your practitioner to discuss this.

Acupuncture for Relief of Pain

Acupuncture can be extremely helpful to relieve all sorts of pain conditions, both chronic and acute. It is useful to know what to expect after a treatment for pain, and the significance of the various reactions.

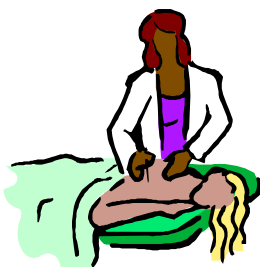
After treatment, pain may feel worse. This is because the blocked energy is starting to move. Perhaps surprisingly, this is a good response! The increase in pain may last for 24 – 36 hours, then start to feel better than it was prior to the treatment.

The pain may feel better more or less immediately, but return after a day or a few days. This is also a good response as it means that further treatment will have a cumulative effect. Make a note of how long the pain was diminished, and discuss this with your practitioner at your next appointment.

After treatment, pain may move to another part of the body. This is also a good result, as it shows that the blocked energy is clearing.

The pain may become worse and does not improve. If after two days it is no better, this is a sign that you need another treatment quite quickly (within three or four days) in order to move the condition along. This happens only rarely but does occur in a few cases.

If there is absolutely no difference at all it is worth having one or two further treatments in order to clarify whether acupuncture is able to help.



Is There Anything I Should Do On The Day Of A Treatment?

People often ask if they should do or avoid doing anything when having an acupuncture treatment. There are a few sensible measures you can take, both before and after the treatment:

- Don't have an enormous meal just before or after treatment; equally, make sure you aren't in a state of hunger.
- It is best to plan for an easy day after treatment, ideally, with time for a rest. Of course this is not always possible. Do make sure, though, that you avoid strenuous exercise such as gardening, decorating, gym, jogging, etc.
- It is also preferable not to drink alcohol on the day of a treatment.
- Some authorities say you should avoid sex after a treatment, but we will leave this to your judgement!

Planning Ahead for Winter

It may seem odd to be thinking of winter when summer has only just arrived. However, it is worth remembering that late summer and early autumn is the prime time for building up the immune system.

If you suffer from recurring colds, hay fever, asthma, or are prone to flu, plan to have an intensive series of treatments from mid-August to late September. This will help to build the Qi, and make it strong enough to withstand problems during the winter and next spring. This is also a good time for sufferers of arthritis to have intensive treatment as well, to minimise problems in the cold, damp days that lie ahead.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Maggie Bavington, Liz Cook, and Beverley de Valois. We are a group of practitioners who trained at the College of Integrated Chinese Medicine. We are all members of the British Acupuncture Council. We practice both the Five Element and Traditional Chinese Medicine styles of acupuncture. We are all committed to ongoing supervision and training and sharing insights from our particular specialities in the interest of better care for our patients. These currently include women's health, pain relief, musculo-skeletal conditions, addiction and detox and acupuncture research.

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now
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