

Acupuncture and Menopause: Creating Physical and Emotional Health with Acupuncture



With its close understanding of the female body, Oriental Medicine has always addressed the special needs of women throughout their lives. Menopause, in particular, is an area in which Oriental Medicine shines. Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine have the ability to detect energetic changes that occur in the body and quickly relieve uncomfortable symptoms that accompany the onset of menopause.

What is Menopause?

Menopause is a transitional period marking the cessation of ovulation in a woman's body. Most women stop menstruating between the ages of 48 and 52, but symptoms can begin as early as 35. Symptoms vary from mild to severe, and are brought on as our bodies try to adapt to decreasing amounts of estrogen. Symptoms include hot flashes, night sweats, insomnia, fatigue, mood swings, memory loss, vaginal dryness, headaches, joint pain, and weight gain.

From an Eastern Perspective

According to Oriental Medical theory, menopause occurs when a woman's body begins to preserve blood and energy in order to sustain her. The kidney is the organ system in Oriental Medicine that is viewed as the root of reproduction, vitality and longevity. Menopause signifies the depletion of the fertility essence stored within the kidneys. Blood and essence from the kidneys are conserved and cycled through the body to nourish the woman's spirit and extend her longevity. Thus, in Oriental Medicine, menopause is seen as true change in life from mother to enlightened and wise being.

Treating Menopause with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

Few areas of women's health stir up as much confusion and debate as Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), which is normally started when the first symptoms of menopause appear. While HRT may alleviate hot flashes and prevent osteoporosis, they may also increase the risk of breast, ovarian and uterine cancer, and have a number of significant side-effects. But HRT isn't the only solution, Oriental medicine has long recognized that health and vitality can be sustained over a woman's lifetime by restoring balance within the body and supporting the natural production of essential hormones.

Lifestyle and Dietary Instructions

Menopause patients are encouraged to maintain a healthy weight and to follow a diet with a high content of raw foods, fruits and vegetables to stabilize blood sugar. Some foods may exacerbate hot flashes or increase mood swings: steer clear of dairy products, red meats, alcohol, sugar, spicy foods, caffeine, and don't smoke. Lastly, try to eliminate stress, tension and anxiety or learn techniques to cope with stress so that you can diminish the effects that it has on your body and mind.

With support from Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine along with small changes in lifestyle and diet, menopause can be a time of a revival of vital energy and an opportunity for personal growth.

Study on Acupuncture for Hot Flashes

Acupuncture reduces nighttime hot flashes caused by menopause, according to a study published in the journal, *Fertility and Sterility*.

Researchers found that seven weeks of acupuncture treatment reduced the severity of nighttime hot flashes by twenty-eight percent among menopausal women compared with a six percent decrease among women who had a sham acupuncture treatment.

The effects of acupuncture vs. a sham acupuncture treatment on the severity and frequency of nighttime hot flashes were compared. Taking part in the study were twenty-nine menopausal women experiencing at least seven moderate to severe hot flashes per day.

All of the women underwent nine treatments from trained acupuncturists in sessions over seven weeks. Twelve of the women received real acupuncture using points selected to target hot flashes and sleepiness. The rest of the women received a sham acupuncture treatment using non-penetrating needles at random acupuncture channel points.



Throughout the study, the women reported the number and severity of their hot flashes. The results showed that nighttime hot flash severity decreased significantly (twenty-eight percent) among the women who received acupuncture vs. a six percent drop among the women who got the sham treatment. However, they did not see a similar finding in the frequency of nighttime hot flashes between the two groups.

Researcher Mary Huang, M.S., of Stanford University, and colleagues say the results suggest acupuncture deserves further study as an alternative treatment for menopausal hot flashes.

Source:

Huang, M. *Fertility and Sterility*, September 2006; Vol. 86: pp. 700-710. News release, American Society of Reproductive Medicine.

Acupuncture Points for Hot Flashes

While many different acupuncture points are used, depending on your specific symptoms and the state of your overall health, here are some acupuncture points that are commonly used to treat menopause:

Du 20 - Located on the top of the head, midway between the ears. This point helps clear the spirit and rebalances the yin and yang elements of the body.

Urinary Bladder 23 (UB 23) - A lower back point that is level to the second lumbar vertebra. This point invigorates the kidney system and nourishes kidney essence. It is often used to strengthen the lumbar region and the knees.

Kidney 3 (Ki 3) – In the depression between the inside ankle bone and the Achilles tendon, level with the tip of the ankle bone. Kidney 3 invigorates and strengthens the kidney system and regulates the uterus.

Kidney 7 (Ki 7) – Located approximately 2 fingers breadth above Kidney 3. It is used to treat hot flashes and night sweats.

Spleen 6 (Sp 6) - Located about 4 fingers breadth above the tip of the inside ankle bone in a depression. This is one of the most influential points for women's health. It strengthens the spleen, resolves damp, promotes the smooth flow of Qi, strengthens the kidneys, nourishes blood and yin, benefits urination, regulates uterus and menstruation, moves and cools blood, relieves pain and calms the mind.

