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Managing Diabetes with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

It is estimated that 25.8 million people in the United States have diabetes, a disease in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin. Insulin is 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, 1 in 4 people remain unaware that they live with diabetes.



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 other medical problems, including heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, peripheral neuropathy, digestive disorders and periodontal disease. In order to manage diabetes, it is essential to make healthy lifestyle choices in diet, exercise and other areas. Another important factor when treating diabetes is creating a support team of health care professionals, including a licensed acupuncturist.

Diabetes According to Oriental Medicine

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine have been used to treat diabetes for over 2000 years. According to Oriental 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 extreme fatigue, lethargy, unexplained weight loss, excessive thirst, excessive urination, excessive eating, slow healing of cuts and wounds, infections, irritability, tingling or numbness in the extremities and blurry vision.

Offering a holistic approach, acupuncture and Oriental medicine provide a treatment plan specifically tailored to each individual to relieve symptoms associated with diabetes. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can assist the body return to a healthy functioning state. In addition to acupuncture, a variety of techniques may be used during treatment, including bodywork, lifestyle changes, dietary recommendations, exercises or herbal medicine.

Call today to learn more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be used to manage diabetes and improve your overall health and well being!

Peripheral Neuropathy? Get Relief with Acupuncture!

Do you or someone you know suffer from peripheral neuropathy?

Common signs of peripheral neuropathy include tingling, numbness, loss of sensation, muscle weakness and pain. It can cause uncomfortable sensations of "pins and needles," or burning pain (especially at night) in the hands or feet. Others may suffer even more extreme symptoms such as muscle wasting, paralysis, or organ or gland dysfunction.



In most cases, peripheral neuropathy is secondary to another condition. There are many factors that can cause peripheral neuropathy, including diabetes, malnutrition, drugs, viral and bacterial infections, alcoholism and poison exposure. Other causes of peripheral neuropathy include compression or entrapment (such as carpal tunnel syndrome), nerve injury, fractures or dislocated bones, penetrating injuries, pressure on superficial nerves resulting from prolonged use of crutches, staying in the same position too long, tumors, intraneural hemorrhage, exposure to cold, radiation or atherosclerosis. With more than 100 types of peripheral neuropathies in existence, each with its own characteristic set of symptoms, pattern of development, and prognosis, the symptoms can vary as much as the cause.

Oriental medicine teaches that peripheral neuropathy is a symptom of many different patterns of disharmony within the body, and is due to dampness moving to the limbs, where it obstructs the flow of Qi (energy) and blood within them. The treatment is twofold: to treat the underlying factor that is causing this dampness to accumulate, and to directly facilitate the circulation of Qi and blood in the affected area. By improving circulation, the nerve tissues of the affected area can be nourished to repair function and reduce pain. Treatment is customized to the needs of each individual based on the cause and symptoms of their neuropathy.

Study on Chronic Peripheral Neuropathy

Researchers show that acupuncture is a secure and effective medical treatment yielding long-term benefits for patients with symptoms of peripheral neuropathy.

A study titled *Acupuncture for the Treatment of Chronic Painful Peripheral Neuropathy: A long-term study*, published by *The Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice Journal in 1998*, demonstrated the potency and long-lasting effects of acupuncture treatment. Forty-six patients diagnosed with diabetic peripheral neuropathy underwent six rounds of acupuncture treatments over a period of 10 weeks. Out of this group, 63% took prescription drugs to cope with their symptoms.

It was noted that after 10 weeks, approximately 77% of all the patients claimed a significant reduction in pain and other symptoms of their peripheral neuropathy. These patients were tracked for up to 52 weeks to monitor their progress after the acupuncture treatments ended. It was then discovered that the 67% of patients using standard medical drug treatment with acupuncture were able to greatly reduce or completely eliminate their medications.

Source: *Abuaisha BB, Boulton AJ, Costanzi JB: Acupuncture for the treatment of chronic painful peripheral diabetic neuropathy: a long-term study. Diab Res Clin Prac 39:115-121, 1998*

Self Care for Peripheral Neuropathy

In addition to seeking Oriental medicine therapy, here are a few things you can practice at home:

Adopt Healthy Habits

Healthy habits such as maintaining optimal weight, avoiding exposure to toxins, following a physician-supervised exercise program, eating a balanced diet, correcting vitamin deficiencies, and limiting or avoiding alcohol consumption can reduce the physical and emotional effects of peripheral neuropathy.

Boost Circulation with Massage

Massage can boost circulation, which is generally poor and leaves these areas vulnerable to trauma. You can stimulate your feet, lower legs, hands and arms with gentle massage using light pressure.

Relax to Reduce External Triggers

Consider relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, self-hypnosis or biofeedback. These can help you learn to control the external factors that trigger pain.

Soak for Pain Relief

A warm foot bath with Epsom salt may also help relieve pain. If there is loss of sensation in the hands or feet, you should avoid extreme temperatures, as you may not feel the damaging effects.

Relief for Diabetic 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.