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Acupuncture Can Help Treat Insomnia

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.

Another patient who also complains of insomnia, anxiety and poor memory, may receive an entirely different acupuncture treatment. This patient has the additional symptoms of a pale complexion, dizziness, and reports that once asleep, the quality of sleep is heavily dream-disturbed. This patient does not wake up refreshed. In contrast to the first patient, this person suffers from insomnia due to heart blood deficiency. Treatment with acupuncture is necessary to tonify and bulk up the heart blood. By doing this, the shen will find the heart a more comfortable home.

If you wake up and still don't feel refreshed because you can't drift off peacefully, or you never seem to fall into a nice, deep sleep, it might be time to consult your practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

Find an Acupuncturist near you to learn how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you!

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.

There are two adages from the days of ancient China that demonstrate the supreme importance of maintaining a proper diet with adequate amounts of food.

Eating is even more important than the Emperor.

He that takes medicine and neglects diet, wastes the skills of the physician.

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, pork, nuts, seeds, tofu, cheese, tuna, and crab.

For those who want non-dairy or vegetarian options high in Vitamin B6 some foods include 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, valerian, lavender, kava, 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, consult a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine to learn more about chewing and sipping your way to a peaceful night's rest.

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Acupuncture for Sleep Deprivation Relief

You don't sleep much at night, but that's normal for many people, especially those who have busy lives filled with tasks and to-do's, right? Sleep deprivation may not seem to be a cause for alarm, but the consequences of this condition can be very real. Snoozing less at night can cause daytime drowsiness, diminished cognitive functions, a drop in immunity, and may potentially lead to other medical conditions. It can be an annoyance, at best; or, it can result in serious outcomes, at worst. Every year thousands of motor

vehicle accidents occur because a driver has fallen asleep at the wheel. In fact, studies show that sleep deprivation can reduce motor skills and decision-making much the same way alcohol can.

The symptoms of sleep deprivation happen for many reasons. For some, it comes about due to outside circumstances. This may include working long late-night shifts, having to endure a noisy nighttime environment, or being a new mother who has to stay awake to care for their newborn. Other times, there may be pre-existing medical conditions that interfere with sleep. Insomnia and sleep apnea are two big culprits that fall into this category.

The good news is that acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help in most of these cases. Located on the back of the head, near the earlobes, is an acupuncture point that specifically addresses sleep issues. This point is called An Mian and translates as Peaceful Sleep. The name describes it all. When this point is utilized by your practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, it serves to induce restorative, peaceful sleep. Additionally, this point has the ability to relieve headaches and soothe an anxious mind. Its versatility allows it to be part of acupuncture treatment for many sufferers of sleep deprivation.

A mother who lacks sleep because she must attend to her infant may find it impossible to get a full night's rest. While acupuncture is not a substitute for a night of restorative sleep, it can provide relief for mom's anxiety, heart palpitations, and headaches. By selecting points that will calm the mind and relieve pain, including An Mian, the little bit of sleep mom is able to get may be of a better quality, and her ability to relax while awake may increase.

Jet lag is another instance when external conditions interfere with sleep. Long journeys on overnight buses or international flights can prove problematic to the sleep and wake cycles. Whether sleep deprivation is due to physical discomfort or nervousness, acupuncture can once again come to the rescue. Before traveling, consider an appointment with your practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine. There are many acupuncture points that can help one cope with upcoming travel plans or any other event that may involve physical and emotional stress.

One example of such a point is called Shen Men and is located on the outer ear. It is also known as Heavenly Gate because it permits 'heavenly' healing energy to flow through a patient's body. The idea is that with the influx of heavenly energy, a person mentally and emotionally enters a state of paradise, where stress and physical discomfort are nonexistent.

It is vitally important to refresh every night with good, solid sleep. Not doing so may increase the risk of diabetes, hypertension, obesity and other medical conditions.

If you believe you suffer from the effects of sleep deprivation, contact a practitioner to learn how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you!

Treatment Options for Sleep Apnea

Have you ever heard someone snoring so loudly it woke you up in the middle of the night? While making some noise during sleep can be perfectly normal, when snoring becomes uncharacteristically loud and thunderous, it may be a symptom of sleep apnea. This occurs strictly during sleep, when the muscles in the back of the throat lose their rigidity and slacken, leaving one struggling for air in the middle of the night. This is a potentially dangerous sleep disorder, also called obstructive sleep apnea, which can take a serious toll on one's daily energy reserves and emotional bearing.

It can be serious and deserves immediate medical treatment because the body becomes starved of oxygen. Normally, the lungs take in oxygen through the breath in and release carbon dioxide with the breath out. This continual cycle of breathing provides nourishment and cleansing for the whole body. In the case of sleep apnea, however, when the muscles surrounding the breathing airway contract, airflow to and from the lungs is restricted. A person may stop breathing for just a few seconds, or, in a worst-case scenario, up to a minute.

According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, when there is interference in the flow of breathing, sleeping or other bodily functions, it may be the result of a condition known as Qi stagnation. Qi is the most essential force necessary for healing and sustaining life. A stagnation of lung Qi may be impeding the breathing cycle. Other signs that lung Qi is failing include waking with a dry mouth (due to the fact that

not enough air is being pulled in through the nose), daytime fatigue and irritability.

One of the vital roles of the lung organ is to protect the body from invaders -- in other words, it serves as a vital component of the immune system. From the perspective of a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, it is doubly important to provide an acupuncture treatment that disperses stagnant lung Qi. One, so the patient can maintain an effortless breathing pattern while asleep; two, the immune system needs support to avoid potential medical complications that may result from sleep apnea, such as fatigue, heart problems, high blood pressure, and abnormal liver functions.

Some sleep apnea patients may benefit from the use of an acupuncture point called Lieque. It is found near the wrist and is part of the lung meridian. A meridian is a pathway that distributes Qi throughout the body. Lieque has the ability to help the lungs disperse and descend Qi. When the lungs do not properly perform this job, symptoms such as snoring, shortness of breath and coughing may occur. Needling this point can also relieve the sensation of a stuffy chest and throat.

A Brazilian study entitled "Treatment of Moderate Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome with Acupuncture: A Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Pilot Trial", published in the medical journal *Sleep Medicine*, achieved some very favorable results. The trial included 36 participants who were randomly assigned to be in one of three groups. The control group received no treatment, the study group received the correct acupuncture treatments for their conditions, while the sham group received acupuncture that did not treat their symptoms.

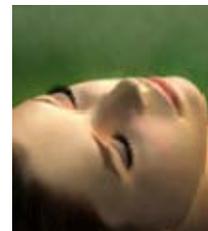
The researchers found that patients in the study group experienced a statistically significant drop in the number of respiratory events during the night, in comparison to both the sham acupuncture and the control group. Respiratory events, in the case of sleep apnea, refer to the number of times a patient stops breathing. It is worth noting that the control group actually experienced an increase in the number of respiratory events. It was also concluded that patients in the study group enjoyed a noteworthy increase in their overall quality of life.

If you ever wake with a headache and feel exhausted even after sleeping all night or have ever had someone tell you that you sound like a freight train when you snore, find an Acupuncturist near you to discuss your concerns and symptoms.

Difficulties Sleeping? Put Insomnia to Rest!

Our society puts a premium on our waking hours and has the tendency to underestimate the importance of a full night's sleep.

The evening is a time to allow our minds and bodies to turn inward to our subconscious. Excessive lighting at night, evening shift work, evening computing, video games, television and late-night eating all serve to counteract the body's natural rhythms. It's no wonder people have trouble sleeping. Exposure to early morning light and dusk helps to regulate sleep hormones in the body. Rather than embrace nighttime, we tend to let our minds wander from one element of stress to another keeping us up for hours or perhaps an entire evening. We are then forced to approach the new day without having benefited from the regenerative powers that nighttime brings.



In Oriental medicine, sleep occurs when the yang energy of the day folds into Yin - nighttime. Yin energy of the body is cooling and restorative. It is the time of day when our bodies turn inward and regenerate. This is the time we dream and explore the caverns of our unconscious mind. Conversely, the daytime is yang, which is expansive. We expend the energy we have built up from the process of sleeping. Together, this is the cycle of yin and yang.

To apply the concept of yin and yang to your everyday life try eating your last meal at least three hours before going to bed. If you are a hot excess type, you can cool your body down by avoiding hot and spicy food and drink. Avoid alcohol, coffee, chocolate any other stimulants, especially late in the day.

Help circulate your body's energy by working out or by gentle exercising. Build your body's nutritive aspect by eating marrow based soups and stews, dark pigmented vegetables and fruits. Avoid overworking or over rumination as well.

One contributor to insomnia, stress, weakens the function of the liver, which in turn affects the health of your nerves. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine have a calming effect on the nervous system clearing obstructions in the muscle and nerve channels, assisting the flow of oxygen-enriched energy and relaxing the system. Commonly noted benefits include deeper breathing, improved digestive abilities, better sleeping patterns, and a general sense of well-being.

By implementing just a few of the following suggestions you should notice a great improvement in your sleep and how you function in the daylight hours.

- Maintain a routine sleep schedule.
- Keep it dark, cool, and quiet.
- Reduce nicotine, caffeine and alcohol use.
- Avoid rigorous exercise 3-5 hours prior to bedtime.
- Avoid heavy meals near bedtime.
- Position clock away from the bed.
- Limit television and computer use to early evening.

Would you like to learn more about how acupuncture can help you? Find an acupuncturist near you for a consultation.

