

Application of Acupuncture in Treating Spleen and Stomach Diseases in Preventive Treatment of Disease (TCM Health Management)

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Abstract:

TCM health management and TCM preventive treatment of disease are inherently connected. “Preventive treatment of disease” is the essence of the TCM prevention and treatment system, as well as a distinctive feature of TCM health management. Using the method of “reverse acupuncture” for “preventive treatment of disease” is a key part of applying acupuncture in TCM health management. Timely and appropriate application of “reverse acupuncture” can give full play to the body’s disease resistance and regulatory capabilities, and maximize the stimulation of the body’s inherent potential to balance yin and yang. The spleen and stomach are the foundation of postnatal life and the source of qi and blood production. Only when the functions of the spleen and stomach are vigorous can the body’s healthy qi remain strong and prevent diseases from invading. This article will discuss the specific case applications of acupuncture in treating spleen and stomach diseases from three aspects: “preventing disease before its onset”, “preventing disease progression after onset”, and “preventing recurrence after recovery”.

Keywords:

Acupuncture and Moxibustion, Spleen and Stomach Diseases, Preventive Treatment Of Disease, TCM Health Management

1. Origin of Acupuncture and TCM Health Management

TCM health management applies the core TCM concepts of “preventive treatment of disease”, “holistic concept”, and “syndrome differentiation and treatment”, combined with the theoretical methods of modern health management. It collects, monitors, analyzes, and evaluates comprehensive TCM information of healthy people, sub-healthy people, and patients, aiming to maintain the health of individuals and groups. It also provides TCM-based health consultation guidance, TCM health education, and various TCM-related interventions for health risk factors [2]. Suwen (Plain Questions), in the chapter “On Puncturing Heat Diseases”, states: “Even if a disease has not yet manifested, puncture when there is a reddish complexion; this is

called preventive treatment of disease” [3]. Lingshu Jing (Miraculous Pivot), in the chapter “On Reversal and Compliance”, says: “A superior physician punctures before a disease arises; the next best punctures before a disease becomes severe... A superior physician treats disease before it occurs, not after it has developed; this is what is meant” [3]. The term “reverse acupuncture” first appeared in Zhenjiu Juying (Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) by Gao Wu in the Ming Dynasty, which defines it as: “Acupuncture administered when there is no disease or before a disease occurs is called ‘reverse’; ‘reverse’ means meeting (the disease) before it arrives”. It refers to a traditional method that uses acupuncture in advance when the body is disease-free or before a disease occurs to stimulate the qi of the meridians, enhance the body’s disease resistance and adaptability, thereby preventing the occurrence of diseases, reducing the damage caused by subsequent diseases, or promoting health and longevity [4].

2. Acupuncture for “Preventive Treatment of Disease” and Prevention/Treatment of Spleen and Stomach Diseases

Zhang Zhongjing stated in Jinkui Yaolue (Synopsis of the Golden Chamber): “In preventive treatment of disease, when a liver disease is detected, one should know that the liver can transmit the disease to the spleen, and thus first strengthen the spleen” [3]. The spleen and stomach are the maintainers of the body’s yin and yang and the hub of the body’s functions. Only when their functions are vigorous can the five zang-organs be harmonized and diseases prevented from invading. Spleen and stomach diseases are common clinical conditions. Their causes mainly include improper diet that impairs the spleen and stomach, and emotional distress that leads to liver qi stagnation, failure of the liver to disperse properly, upward disturbance of liver qi attacking the stomach, and failure of the stomach to descend harmoniously. Spleen and stomach diseases tend to recur and have a long course, which not only affects work and life but also incurs high medical costs. If proper prevention and treatment are carried out in daily life to replenish healthy qi, the incidence of diseases can be reduced, the cure rate improved, and the recurrence rate lowered.

The concept of acupuncture for “preventive treatment of disease” in the prevention and treatment of spleen and stomach diseases is specifically reflected in three aspects: preventing disease before its onset, preventing disease progression after onset, and preventing recurrence.

2.1. Preventing Disease Before Its Onset

Zhang Tangfa [5] attached particular importance to the prevention and treatment of spleen and stomach diseases through “treating winter diseases in summer” and “three-nine day moxibustion”. He emphasized “nourishing during the three-volt days” and “supplementing during the three-nine days”. He believed that three-volt day moxibustion focuses on expelling pathogenic factors during the period of abundant yang qi, while three-nine day moxibustion is for “preventing winter diseases in winter”, focusing on warming and replenishing yang qi and strengthening healthy qi to dispel pathogenic factors when yang qi is insufficient. The combined application of these two methods in winter and summer complements each other. He advocated that patients with chronic spleen and stomach diseases should, during the three-volt days and three-nine days of each year, use drugs such as clove, evodia, dried ginger, tangerine peel, and charred hawthorn—dried, ground into powder, and made into a paste with vinegar or ginger juice—and apply the paste to acupoints such as Pishu

(BL20), Weishu (BL21), Zhongwan (CV12), and Zusanli (ST36) [6], with the main goal of preventing disease before its onset.

2.2. Preventing Disease Progression After Onset

In Tang Runxia's [7] observational study on the efficacy of acupuncture in treating 50 cases of epigastric pain, syndrome differentiation-based acupuncture was applied at Zhongwan (CV12), Neiguan (PC6, bilateral), Zusanli (ST36, bilateral), and Weishu (BL21, bilateral). Additional acupoints were selected based on syndrome differentiation: Taichong (LR3) for qi stagnation, Mingmen (GV4) for deficiency-cold, Sanyinjiao (SP6) for yin deficiency, Geshu (BL17) for blood stasis, and Quchi (LI11) for damp-heat. Reinforcing and reducing twisting-rotating manipulation was adopted. Based on the theory that "excess belongs to Yangming Stomach, deficiency belongs to Taiyin Spleen", the reducing method was used for syndromes tending to excess, while the reinforcing method combined with moxibustion was used for syndromes tending to deficiency. Among the 50 treated cases, 45 cases achieved marked effectiveness (accounting for 90.0%), 3 cases achieved effectiveness (accounting for 6.0%), and 2 cases were ineffective (accounting for 4.0%), with an overall effective rate of 96.0% [7].

Zhongwan (CV12) is an acupoint of the Foot-Yangming Stomach Meridian and the front-mu point of the stomach. Located near the stomach, it is a primary acupoint for treating spleen and stomach diseases. Zusanli (ST36) is an acupoint of the Stomach Meridian and the "lower he-sea point" of the stomach. According to the principle of "treating zang-fu diseases with he-sea points", Zusanli (ST36) is an excellent acupoint for treating spleen and stomach diseases. The combination of Zhongwan (CV12) and Zusanli (ST36) (distant and local acupoints) has the function of regulating stomach qi. Neiguan (PC6) is a collateral acupoint of the Pericardium Meridian, connecting to the Shaoyang Meridian. The Shaoyang Meridian is the hub of qi movement, which helps regulate the ascending and descending of spleen and stomach qi. Weishu (BL21) is the acupoint on the back where the qi of the stomach is infused, and it enhances the effect of relieving spasm and pain. The combined use of these four acupoints jointly achieves the effects of harmonizing the spleen and stomach, soothing the liver and regulating qi, and relieving spasm and pain.

In terms of syndrome differentiation-based acupoint selection for preventing disease progression after onset, attention should be paid to preventing the transmission between "mother and child" organs, mainly manifested in preventing "mother disease affecting the child" and "child consuming the mother's qi". [8] The spleen and stomach belong to the Earth element in the Five Elements. Fire generates Earth; kidney yang deficiency (Fire) failing to warm the Earth (spleen and stomach) is a specific manifestation of "mother disease affecting the child". "Kidney yang deficiency and decline, Fire failing to warm the Earth, leading to inability to ripen food" [8]—insufficient kidney yang fails to warm and nourish the stomach, resulting in stomach pain; spleen and kidney yang deficiency causes diarrhea with undigested food. Therefore, in the treatment of chronic spleen and stomach diseases, simultaneous treatment of the spleen and kidney is required to tonify kidney Fire and warm the middle-Jiao (spleen and stomach), preventing kidney yang decline from affecting the functions of the spleen and stomach. Furthermore, the spleen and stomach (Earth) generate the lung (Metal); insufficient lung qi can also affect the transportation and transformation functions of the spleen and stomach, which is known as "child consuming the mother's qi". In clinical diagnosis and treatment,

Taiyuan (LU9) is often selected to regulate the spleen and stomach. Taiyuan (LU9) is the mother acupoint of the Lung Meridian and belongs to the Earth element in the Five Elements. The Foot-Yangming Stomach Meridian is a yang meridian; its jing-well acupoint Lidui (ST45) belongs to the Metal element, and its meridian acupoint Taixi (KI3) belongs to the Fire element. Clinically, the principle of “reinforcing the mother for deficiency, reducing the child for excess” [8] is often applied: for deficiency syndromes of spleen and stomach diseases, the mother acupoint (Taixi, KI3) is reinforced; for excess syndromes, the child acupoint (Lidui, ST45) is reduced.

2.3. Preventing Recurrence

Zhang Zhongjing stated in *Shanghan Lun* (Treatise on Febrile Diseases): “When a disease has just recovered, if one is forced to eat heavily, the spleen and stomach qi are still weak and unable to digest food”; “After recovery from a severe illness, overexertion leads to recurrence” [6]. This indicates that after recovery from illness, attention should be paid to dietary care and other measures to prevent disease recurrence, and regulating the spleen and stomach is particularly important. In the early stage of recovery, the functions of the spleen and stomach have not yet fully recovered, and the deficient spleen and stomach cannot tolerate tonification. Therefore, the diet should be light, with less tonic food, to slowly regulate and gradually restore the qi of the spleen and stomach. At the same time, Zhang Tangfa [7] suggested and guided patients to coordinate acupuncture at Gongsun (SP4) and the plantar region, and moxibustion at Zhongwan (CV12), Shenque (CV8), and Qihai (CV6) to regulate spleen and stomach functions. Additionally, combining with “syndrome differentiation-based diet therapy” and “diet therapy based on individual, regional, and seasonal differences” helps the body gradually move toward recovery.

From the perspective of modern health management, acupuncture for treating epigastric pain can relieve gastric spasm, regulate gastric peristalsis, and has a bidirectional regulatory effect. It also shows significant efficacy in improving patients’ gastroscopic signs and various gastric mucosal lesions, and significantly reduces the incidence rate [5].

3. Conclusions

Integrating the concept of acupuncture for “preventive treatment of disease” into the entire process of preventing and treating spleen and stomach diseases in TCM health management requires three key steps: first, guiding acupuncture clinical practice with classic theories to connect traditional knowledge with current applications; second, accurately understanding and distinguishing the differences and relationships between “disease not yet onset”, “disease already onset”, and “disease transmission” to detect subtle signs and predict disease trends; finally, grasping the timing of treatment—physicians must fully understand the pathogenesis and course of diseases, and take therapeutic measures before the disease occurs or progresses to ensure treatment efficacy. Therefore, the selection of timing for acupuncture in “preventive treatment of disease” is crucial for achieving good preventive and therapeutic effects, thereby realizing the goals of preventing disease before its onset, preventing disease progression after onset, and preventing recurrence. With the growing attention to TCM health management (i.e., TCM “preventive treatment of disease”) and the continuous deepening of research on acupuncture for preventive treatment of disease, acupuncture will play a more significant role in the field of “preventive treatment of disease” with its unique characteristics in disease prevention and treatment.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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