

Acupuncture and the Immune System Part 2

Acupuncture and the Immune System: Part 2 - A Traditional Chinese Perspective

by: Craig Amrine

While Part 1 of this article discussed the effect of acupuncture on the immune system from a bio-chemical perspective, Part 2 describes how disease, specifically infectious disease, is seen from a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) viewpoint.

As the understanding of external pathogenic (infectious) diseases evolved in China, so did the various theories on how to describe them. In it's most simple form, these diseases were seen as invasions of "Wind". Exterior wind was seen to invade the body through the skin by way of the Lungs. In TCM, the Lungs were seen to control sweating and spread defensive (Wei) Qi around the body. So, this is where the battle began. As the Wind invades the body, it is fought by this defensive Qi. Several types of Wind exist, and the specific symptoms that manifest during this battle will categorize what type of Wind it is.

The various types of Wind types are: Wind Cold, Wind Heat, Wind Dampness, Wind Dryness, and Wind Water. The differences were characterized by the corresponding symptoms, the texture of the pulse, and the appearance of the tongue. The symptoms for the different types of wind can be seen below¹:

Wind-Cold: Severe stiffness and ache of occiput (back of head) and body, sneezing, cough, fever, dislike cold, no sweating, no thirst, runny nose with white-watery mucus.

Wind-Heat: Mild stiffness and ache of occiput (back of head) and body, sneezing, cough, fever, dislike cold, itchy sore throat, swollen tonsils, sweating, thirst, runny nose with yellow mucus.

Wind-Dampness: Muscle ache, swollen joints, feeling of "heaviness in the body", dislike cold, swollen neck-glands, nausea, sweating, fever, dislike cold

Wind-Dry: Slight dislike of cold, dry skin, nose, and mouth, sore throat, dry cough

Craig Amrine L.Ac. is the owner and operator of Hidden Rhythm Acupuncture located in the heart of Tempe, Arizona. These monthly newsletters are designed to help educate the public on various afflictions that acupuncture as a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine is known to treat. Each month, Craig will address a new health challenge that commonly affects the general public and offer a brief explanation on each disease from both the Western perspective as well as from the Traditional Chinese Medical perspective. He will also offer his own thoughts on treatment based on personal clinical observation and treatment experience.



Wind-Water: Dislike of cold, cough with heavy white and watery mucus, sweating, no thirst.

The nature of Wind is dynamic, so a patient can often have symptoms of more than one Wind type. It is also common for symptoms to transform or progress from one Wind type to another.

To further complicate matters, TCM views these Wind patterns in terms of different “levels” or “stages” in the body. Each “level” or “stage” describes how the disease begins at the surface of the body, and how if left un-treated, will sink deeper with symptoms becoming more serious and eventually attack the organs. The *general* trend is that as the disease progresses, it transforms predominantly towards a heat condition where it can eventually burn out the body’s internal substances.

Within TCM, we have several types of Qi in the body. For example, Gu-Qi is derived from the food we eat, Jing-Luo (meridian) Qi flows along the meridians that we access with acupuncture, and Wei (Defensive) Qi serves to protect the body from external pathogens and is considered the first line of defense against disease.

In it’s most fundamental form, TCM views health in terms of proper balance. When we are near to being in balance, our Qi is strong and resistant to attack. When we are out of balance, we are left vulnerable to disease or “disharmony”. If, through diet, lifestyle, or trauma, our Qi becomes weak or “stuck”, we are much more prone to getting sick.

So, when we first encounter a Wind attack, our goal is to both “expel” the wind and to strengthen the Wei-Qi. While this may seem esoteric and even a bit silly, the end-result is that we use acupuncture points that are proven to increase levels of white-blood cells as well as to lower fever².

What about cancer/tumors? Within TCM, tumors are often seen as toxic heat in the body. So, both acupuncture and herbs designed to clear toxic heat are used. Interestingly, there are encouraging anti-tumor effects of TCM herbs according to some studies^{3,4}. In fact, there is a large body of evidence highlighting the positive effects of herbs on cancer. Since this article is more focused on acupuncture however, that is beyond the scope of this article.

The final word on using acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine in the fight against diseases and cancer is that early detection and treatment is important and stress that Traditional Chinese Medicine is an extremely powerful tool in fighting disease/cancer. It can be effective in prevention as well as in both early and later stages of disease progression. With virtually no *negative* side-effects, TCM can work hand-in-hand with more conventional therapies including chemo-therapy and radiation to increase comfort, decrease symptoms, and ultimately speed recovery.

Sources:

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