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Treating Autoimmune Diseases with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

Autoimmune diseases are a group of disorders in which the immune system attacks the body and destroys or alters tissues. There are more than eighty serious chronic illnesses in this category including rheumatoid arthritis, type 1 diabetes, lupus, thyroid disease, inflammatory bowel disease, Addison's disease, pernicious anemia, celiac disease, multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis and Guillain-Barré syndrome. According to the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association (AARDA) twenty percent of the population suffers from autoimmune disorders. Each disease appears uncommon on an individual basis but, as a group, the disorders make up the fourth-largest cause of disability among women.



Due to the complexity of treating autoimmune disorders, integrative medicine solutions including acupuncture and Oriental medicine have received much attention as successful therapies in their treatment particularly for use in providing pain relief, regulating the immune system, managing symptoms and improving overall quality of life.

What Causes Autoimmune Disease?

Under normal conditions, an immune response cannot be triggered against the cells of one's own body. In certain cases, however, immune cells make a mistake and attack the very cells that they are meant to protect. This can lead to a variety of autoimmune diseases which encompass a broad category of over 100 diseases in which the person's immune system attacks his or her own tissue.

The exact mechanisms causing these changes are not completely understood, but bacteria, viruses, toxins, and some drugs may play a role in triggering an autoimmune process in someone who already has a genetic (inherited) predisposition to develop such a disorder. It is theorized that the inflammation initiated by these agents, toxic or infectious, somehow provokes in the body a "sensitization" (autoimmune reaction) in the involved tissues.

As the disease develops vague symptoms start to appear, such as joint and muscle pain, general muscle weakness, possible rashes or low-grade fever, trouble concentrating, or weight loss. The following symptoms may point toward something being wrong: numbness and tingling in hands and feet, dry eyes, hair loss, shortness of breath, heart palpitations, or repeated miscarriages can also be caused by an autoimmune response.

In This Issue

- Treating Autoimmune Diseases with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine**
- Acupuncture for Rheumatoid Arthritis**
- 6 Nutrients to Support Your Immune System**

6 Nutrients to Support Your Immune System



A class of plant chemicals known as bioflavonoids has been found to dramatically reduce inflammation and improve symptoms associated with autoimmune disorders. Here are six that can be found in everyday foods.

Carotenoids - A family of plant pigments that include beta-carotene. A lack of carotenoids in the diet is thought to promote inflammation. Good sources of carotenoids include apricots, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato, spinach, kale, butternut squash, and collard greens.

Fiber - A healthy and active colon can decrease food sensitivity, which, in turn, can lighten the burden on your immune system. For maximum autoimmune health, increase the fiber in your diet.

How Acupuncture Treats Autoimmune Disorders

According to Oriental medicine, autoimmune disorders occur when there is imbalance within the body. Imbalance can come from an excess or deficiency of yin and yang that disrupts the flow of Qi, or vital energy, through the body. Acupuncture is used to help the body restore balance, treating the root of the disorder, while specifically addressing the symptoms that are unique to each individual.

Clinical research has shown that acupuncture causes physical responses in nerve cells, the pituitary gland, and parts of the brain. These responses can cause the body to release proteins, hormones, and brain chemicals that control a number of body functions. It is proposed that, by these actions, acupuncture affects blood pressure, body temperature and the immune system.

In addition to acupuncture, your treatment program to manage your autoimmune disorder may involve a combination of therapies including stress reducing exercises, moderate physical activity, herbal medicine and nutritional support.

Learn more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be safely and effectively incorporated into treating autoimmune disorders, call for a consultation today!

Flavenoids - Found in green and black teas both catechins and theaflavins are beneficial in autoimmune disease.

Ginger - Recent studies show that ginger reduces inflammation by inhibiting prostaglandin and suppresses the immune system's production of pro-inflammatory cytokines and chemokines, reducing disease severity in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

Omega-3 - These essential fatty acids found in cold water fish such as salmon or mackerel and flaxseed oil can counter the formation of chemicals that cause inflammation.

Quercetin - Found naturally in certain foods quercetin can reduce allergic reactions and decrease inflammation. Foods rich in quercetin include apples (skin on), berries, red grapes, red onions, capers, and black tea.

Acupuncture for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disorder that can affect many different joints and, in some people, other parts of the body as well, including the blood, the lungs, and the heart. Inflammation of the joint lining, called the synovium, can cause pain, stiffness, swelling, warmth, and redness. The affected joint may also lose its shape, resulting in loss of normal movement. Rheumatoid arthritis can last a long time and can be a disease of flares (active symptoms) and remissions (few to no symptoms).

According to Oriental medical theory, arthritis arises when the cyclical flow of Qi in the meridians becomes blocked. This blockage is called, "bi" type pain and is widely studied and successfully treated using a combination of acupuncture and/or Chinese herbs.

Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine have been found to be extremely effective at treating the pain and inflammation associated with all types of arthritis. The acupuncture points and herbs that are used depend on if the blockage of Qi (arthritis) is caused by the pathogen wind, cold, damp or damp-heat.

Call today to learn how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be incorporated into your treatment plan for rheumatoid arthritis!

Is Sunscreen Dangerous?

With summer weather here, many of us are spending a lot more time in the sun. For a six billion year old star, the sun has been in the news a lot lately. There seems to be some controversy about sunshine and how much is good for us and whether or not sunscreens are a good idea.

Ultraviolet radiation is part of the electromagnetic light spectrum that reaches the earth from the sun. This light has wavelengths shorter than visible light which makes it invisible to our naked eye. These wavelengths are classified as UVA, UVB, and UVC. Most UVC rays are absorbed by the ozone layer and don't reach the earth.

UVA rays account for up to 95% of the UV radiation that reaches the earth. It penetrates our skin more deeply than UVB and has long been known to play a major role in skin aging. In recent years, studies also now show that UVA damages deeper layers of skin which contributes to, and may even initiate, the development of skin cancers. UVA is the dominant tanning ray, and we know that tanning, whether outdoors or in a salon, causes cumulative damage over time.

Tanning booths primarily emit UVA. The high-pressure sunlamps used in tanning salons emit doses as much as twelve times that of the sun. Not surprisingly, people who use tanning salons are 2.5 times more likely to develop squamous cell carcinoma, and 1.5 times more likely to develop basal cell carcinoma.

UVB rays are less numerous than UVA. These rays are the chief cause of sunburn and they mainly damage the superficial skin layers. They also contribute to skin aging and skin cancers. But, UVB rays are also mostly responsible for helping our skin make Vitamin D.

Vitamin D plays a crucial role in overall health and well being. It is critical to have optimal levels for cardiovascular and immune health, it protects against cancer, helps keep your bones and teeth strong, and has numerous other benefits. Sun exposure allows your body to make Vitamin D in the healthiest form available. The key is to find a healthy balance between getting enough sun exposure and protecting yourself from too much sun and avoiding sunburn.

Most commercial sunscreens interfere with the skin's ability to make Vitamin D and they contain toxic chemicals. Until recently, most sunscreens did not filter out UVA rays. They mostly blocked UVB, ensuring that your body couldn't make Vitamin D.

A 2010 report from the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) joins the growing chorus of voices that question the wisdom of sunscreen use. In the report, EWG states that the ingredients in most sunscreens may raise cancer risk. And that doesn't seem to be the only health problem associated with them. Many widely available sunscreens contain potentially harmful ingredients, some of which are carcinogenic and other ingredients that disrupt hormone balance and generate harmful free radicals.

The synthetic chemicals used in sunscreen can be absorbed into your bloodstream and can cause side effects, like hormone disruption. These chemicals include :

- OMC (Octyl methoxycinnamate)
- Octocrylene
- Oxybenzone
- Avobenzone
- Homosalate
- Octisalate
- Octinoxatre

All these chemicals have estrogen-like effects in your body. These effects have been linked to increased cancer rates, cause birth defects in children, lower sperm counts in men, and other medical issues. Many of these same chemicals are also free radical generators, which are implicated in cancer growth. Avoid sunscreen that has Vitamin A (as retinyl palmitate and other forms) in it, also. It seems Vitamin A in sunscreen speeds the development of tumors and skin lesions in laboratory studies.

Worldwide, the greatest rise in melanoma has been found in countries where sunscreens are mostly widely used. Queensland, Australia has more cases of melanoma than anywhere else on earth. Sunscreen has been heavily promoted there. Actually several studies confirm that appropriate sun exposure helps prevent melanoma and other skin cancers. Conversely, commercial sunscreen use can increase skin cancer incidence.

Also, melanoma is more common in indoor workers, and is more common on parts of your body that are not exposed to the sun at all. And, UVB radiation has been found to delay the appearance of melanoma if you are genetically predisposed or prone to skin cancer. So as you see, it's a fine line to get the right balance between enough and too much sun.

The best protection against sun damage is clothing and hats, not sunscreen. Cotton clothing provides about 15 SPF, or about 15 times your skin's normal protection. Just remember even with clothing on, it's still important to monitor your skin for signs of sunburn. Sunburn provides no health benefits, and is never good for you.

It is also very important to gradually acclimate to the sun. Start with 10-20 minutes per day, even less if you have sensitive skin. Sunshine can cause rapid oxidation of your skin, especially if you eat a lot of polyunsaturated fatty acids, which are found in grains, vegetable oils, grain-fed meats, etc.

If you can't control the amount of your sunlight exposure, for example, if you work outside, then by all means use a natural sunscreen that contains either titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. These two substances seem to be safer and block UVA and UVB. For a more complete list of safe sunscreens, please see the www.ewg.org website.

To your continued good health,

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