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Treating Holiday Stress and Depression with Acupuncture

According to Oriental medicine, the cold months of winter are the perfect time to recharge your battery and generate vital energy, or Qi, in order to live, look, and feel your best.

The ancient Chinese believed that human beings should live in harmony with the natural cycles of their environment. The cold and darkness of winter urges us to slow down. This is the time of year to reflect on health, replenish energy and conserve strength.

Ruled by the water element, winter is associated with the kidneys, bladder and adrenal glands. The kidneys are considered the source of all energy or "Qi" within the body. They store all of the reserve Qi in the body so that it can be used in times of stress and change, or to heal, prevent illness and age gracefully.

Winter is the season where all living things slow down, conserve their energy and prepare for the outburst of new life and energy in the spring.

Eat warm hearty soups, whole grains, and roasted nuts to help warm the body's core and to keep nourished. Sleep early, rest well, stay warm, and expend a minimum quantity of energy.

While optimal health and well-being in the winter season calls for rest, energy conservation and the revitalization of body and spirit, your holiday activities may have a different agenda.

The holidays can be filled with a dizzying array of demands, visitors, travel and frantic shopping trips. For many people, it is also a time filled with sadness, self-reflection, loneliness and anxiety. Compound the usual seasonal pressures with the constant barrage of bad economic news and you may find this to be one of the most emotionally trying times of the year.

Stress, anxiety and depression can cause a disruption in the flow of vital energy, or Qi, through the body. These energetic imbalances can throw off the immune system or cause symptoms of pain, sleep disturbances, abnormal digestion, headaches, and menstrual irregularities, and, over time, more serious illnesses can develop.

Acupuncture treatments can correct these imbalances and directly affect the way your body manages stress and your mental health.

Seasonal acupuncture treatments in winter serve to nurture and nourish kidney Qi which can greatly enhance the body's ability to thrive in times of stress, aid in healing, prevent illness and increase vitality.

Call now and schedule your seasonal tune-up today!



In This Issue

Treating Holiday Stress and Depression with Acupuncture

Studies Show Acupuncture Effective for Stress and Depression

Three Super-Stress Busting Foods

Three Super-Stress Busting Foods



The foods that you eat play a crucial role in your overall well-being as well as your ability to handle stress.

Over 1400 chemical changes occur as stress hormones, such as cortisone, deplete important nutrients such as B vitamins, vitamin C and magnesium from the body.

Here are three foods that can replenish your supply of these nutrients and enhance your ability to manage stress:

Studies Show Acupuncture Effective for Stress and Depression

Since the early seventies, studies around the globe have suggested that treating mental health disorders with acupuncture has a positive and holistic effect on depressed patients, particularly when used in combination with psychotherapy and herbal treatments.

Psychologist John Allen, from the University of Arizona in Tucson, and Acupuncturist Rosa Schnyer, conducted the very first pilot controlled study on treating depression symptoms with acupuncture in the Western scientific world. In a double blind randomized study, 34 depressed female patients who met the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria were assigned to one of three treatment groups for eight weeks.

The first group received acupuncture treatment specifically tailored to their depression symptoms. The second group received a general acupuncture treatment not specific to depression, and the third group was placed on a waiting list for acupuncture treatment, but received no treatment. Those in the tailored acupuncture treatment group experienced a significant reduction in symptoms, compared to those in the non-specific treatment group. Moreover, over 50% of the participants no longer met the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for depression after the study.

Study findings suggest that using acupuncture alone could be as effective as other types of treatments for relieving depression symptoms typically used in Western medicine, such as psychotherapy and drugs.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the substantial benefits of acupuncture specifically in the treatment of stress.

In 2008 Anesthesia & Analgesia published a study finding that an acupuncture point alleviated preoperative anxiety in children while a 2003 study conducted at Yale University showed that ear acupuncture significantly lowered the stress level of the mothers of children that were scheduled for surgery.

A German study published in Circulation found acupuncture significantly lowers both systolic and diastolic blood pressure. The extent of the blood pressure reductions by acupuncture treatments was comparable to those seen with anti-hypertensive medication or aggressive lifestyle changes, including radical salt restrictions.

The University of New Mexico measured the affects of acupuncture on 73 men and women with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The researchers found the acupuncture treatments to be as helpful as the standard treatment of cognitive behavioral therapy.

If the stress or depression in your life is throwing you off balance, consider acupuncture therapy to regain peace of mind, regulate your immune system and stay healthy.

Cauliflower – Cauliflower and other cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, and kale are chock full of stress-relieving B vitamins. Cauliflower is also one of the very best sources of vitamin B5 or pantothenic acid.

Pantothenic acid helps turn carbohydrates and fats into usable energy and improves your ability to respond to stress by supporting your adrenal glands. Fatigue, listlessness, numbness and tingling or burning pain in the feet are all indications that you may need more vitamin B5 in your diet.

Salmon – Salmon is a healthy and delicious way to get your dose of B vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids. Vitamin B12 supports production of red blood cells, allows nerve cells to develop properly and is essential to the synthesis of the “happy” brain chemical serotonin.

Among the many benefits of omega-3 fatty acids, a 2003 study published in Diabetes & Metabolism found that a diet rich in omega-3 fatty acids significantly reduced the stress response and kept the stress hormones cortisol and epinephrine in check.

Blackberries - Blackberries are jam packed with Vitamin C, calcium and magnesium. Vitamin C has shown to be a powerful stress reducer that can lower blood pressure and return cortisol levels to normal faster when taken during periods of stress.

Blackberries have more than double the amounts of vitamin C, calcium and magnesium than their popular cousin, the blueberry.

Osteoporosis - Part I

Hello everyone,

Fifty years ago, most of us had never heard of osteoporosis. Very few doctors had even seen a patient with it. Hip fractures and pressure fractures of the spine were unusual and were mostly found in the very elderly. Today that has changed, and we seem to be facing a growing osteoporosis epidemic.

Osteoporosis is defined medically as having low bone density and a deteriorated bone structure, which results in bone fragility and a susceptibility to fracture. It is similar to a house whose structure has been weakened by termites.

What we hear about is mostly bone density, but bone quality is also a very important factor in bone health. Most of us think of bone as a hardened, static substance, yet bone is a dynamic, alive tissue that constantly undergoes remodeling. For our purposes, we will limit our discussion of bone cells to 2 types: osteoblasts and osteoclasts. Osteoblasts make new bone; osteoclasts break down and remodel old, brittle bone, keeping bone tissue healthy and strong.

Americans are breaking bones more than they used to at the same age. "And it's not just because the population is aging", says Dr. Marian Hannan of the Harvard Medical School. Differences in physical activity may play a part, but experts suspect that environmental factors, toxins like lead and cadmium, may be of more importance. Heavy metals and other toxins are stored in bone tissue.

The lack of good, whole food nutrition is being recognized as a vital factor in bone health. Eating processed and denatured foods does not provide adequate nutrition for bone health. Eating too much sugar, artificial sweeteners, and soft drinks robs your body of much needed vitamins and minerals.

Many studies have shown the negative effects of soft drink consumption on bone mineralization. Adolescent girls who drink sodas are much more likely to develop osteoporosis in their adult years.

We have all heard of the benefits of taking calcium and vitamin D for bone health. But, it's not as simple as popping a vitamin pill. Most studies that found benefit from ingesting calcium and vitamin D involved eating whole foods and other factors such as regular weight-bearing exercise.

Studies that didn't show benefit mostly used separated calcium and vitamin D supplements in a nonfood form. Or the calcium needed to be taken for 5 years to show bone benefits and when the synthetic supplement was stopped, people quickly forfeited bone density gain.

So, it is best to get bone nutrition from whole foods and whole food supplements. Women who get their calcium from real foods have stronger bones than those whose calcium comes from nonfood sources. And calcium from real food sources appears to also affect estrogen processing in ways that improve bone health.

Ads tell us that milk and milk products are a good source of calcium. It's true that dairy foods contain calcium, but it is rendered less bio-available because of pasteurization. The high temperatures of the pasteurizing process destroy most of the phosphatase in milk, which is an enzyme responsible for the absorption of calcium.

The famed Nurses Health Study concluded, after 18 years, that the women who consumed the most (pasteurized) dairy foods had an INCREASED risk of fracture. And in fact, countries with the highest dairy intake (i.e., United States) have the highest rates of hip fractures and osteoporosis. Raw dairy products have much higher amounts of usable calcium than pasteurized ones.

It is possible to get calcium from non-dairy sources. We absorb and utilize calcium from cruciferous vegetables (kale, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, bok choy) better than from pasteurized dairy, even though the calcium content is lower in the vegetables. Eating the veggies with some fat helps mineral absorption even more. So put some butter on your vegetables! Beans, spinach, carrots, and sardines also contain significant amounts of calcium.

Vitamin D is another critical bone nutrient. It enhances calcium absorption, helps maintain blood calcium levels, and regulates calcium/phosphorus balance. Clearly, vitamin D is essential to preventing fractures, though it works better if it's from a natural food source. The best source of vitamin D is the sun. A moderate amount of sunshine greatly enhances our Vitamin D status. Make sure you get some sun on your limbs and face on a regular basis. And include plenty of essential fatty acids from food or whole food supplements (i.e., fish oil).

There is currently a great deal of controversy over the dose of vitamin D that is required for most people on a daily basis. The Institute of Medicine just concluded that we need 600 IU's of vitamin D daily, an amount that most natural health practitioners consider to be too low. I am recommending a dose of 4,000-6,000 IU's of vitamin D from a whole food supplement, so that you get the entire D complex not just a fraction. Good food sources of vitamin D are eggs, fish, and cod liver oil.

In the January issue, we will continue the discussion on bone health. I will outline how bone problems are treated in conventional medicine circles.

Wishing everyone a peaceful and joyous holiday season!

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