

Acupuncture Research Update

"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food." - Hippocrates

Acupuncture and Depression



A study published by BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine looked at the effects of acupuncture in the treatment of depression. For the study, rats were exposed to three weeks of chronic unpredictable mild stress, which put them into a state of depression. Once depression had set in, the rats were then treated using two acupuncture points for 10-minute sessions. What was discovered was that depression-like behaviors were decreased using this treatment method. Therefore, it was determined by this particular study, that acupuncture indeed has positive effects on the symptoms of depression and can be used as a means to treat the disease.

Depression is defined as a mental disorder characterized by feelings of dejection and severe despondency. Worldwide, nearly 350 million people suffer from depression and nearly

16 million of those are in the United States alone. Statistics show women tend to be more likely to experience depression and young adults between the ages of 18 to 22 are also at higher risk. Symptoms of depression include extreme irritability over minor issues, anxiety, restlessness, irrational anger, lack of interest in everyday activities, thoughts of death, insomnia, severe fatigue, weight gain/loss, difficulty concentrating and unexplained aches and pains. When these symptoms occur for more than a few weeks, depression may be the reason behind them.

As shown in the aforementioned study, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is very effective in treating depression, not only short-term, but also long-term. Modern medicine usually treats depression with antidepressants and psychotherapy regardless of the presenting symptoms. In contrast, TCM diagnoses each patient on an individual basis and treats the specific symptoms, while also addressing the root of the illness.

Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine can help alleviate symptoms of depression while also attacking the root cause(s), thus bringing the body and mind back into balance. The body and mind are inseparable and should be treated as a whole, which is the approach used by acupuncturists. When we experience emotional challenges and become upset, our physical body may become affected as well. Then a vicious cycle begins because the emotions are greatly impacted by what we can and cannot do physically.

The theory behind treating depression using TCM, all revolves around the concept of Qi (pronounced "chee"). Qi is considered the vital energy that flows through the body and animates everything. When Qi is blocked or stagnant, illness can take root, either physically or mentally. Qi flows throughout the body on energetic pathways or meridians. Each energetic meridian is associated with an organ and each organ has its own emotion. For example, the emotion of the liver meridian is anger. When Qi is blocked and liver Qi stagnation occurs, anger can then manifest. From the same standpoint, if a person is excessively angry, the flow of Qi can be blocked creating stagnation.

Acupuncture releases endorphins and activates natural pain killers. By doing so, it improves the flow of Qi throughout the body while eliminating blockages and bringing balance to the mind and body. Endorphins counter the symptoms of depression and allow the person to resume a normal life.

If you are suffering from depression and are looking for a natural way of dealing with it, contacting a licensed acupuncturist might be exactly what you need. A local acupuncturist can help you navigate the waters of depression without the harmful side-effects of pharmaceuticals, while helping you get back to a happier life.

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