

Applying the Principle of Harmonising Heart and Kidney in the Treatment of Menopause Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to observe and evaluate acupuncture results for menopause syndrome. Method: Harmonising Heart and Kidney. Result: total effect 93.33%. Conclusion: to treat both brain and ovaries is an effective methodology for menopause syndrome.

Keywords: Acupuncture, menopause syndrome

INTRODUCTION

Menopause syndrome is a group of symptoms that occur in the months or years leading up to menopause. The symptoms include: irregular periods, vaginal dryness, hot flashes, night sweats, sleep problems, mood changes, weight gain and slowed metabolism, thinning hair, dry skin and decreased libido. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), it belongs to 'zang zao' (dryness of internal organs). Zang organs like Kidney, Liver, Heart and Spleen are usually considered for the treatment.

In over 20 years of acupuncture practice, I have found that applying the principle of harmonising Heart and Kidney is the most effective protocol in treating menopause syndrome.

Tian gui, also known as Kidney Essence, comes from the congenital root and is nourished by the acquired root. It is the substance that dominates growth and reproduction. *Huangdi Neijing, The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, says 'when a woman reaches 49 years old, her *tian gui* is exhausted and thus periods cease.'

In TCM, there is a harmony between Heart and Kidney. Heart Fire (*yang*) goes downwards to Kidney to warm Kidney Water (*yin*), so Kidney Water is not too cold; Kidney Water goes upwards to nourish Heart so Heart Fire is not too hot. Thus, a balance is created between Water and Fire, in other words, between *yin* and *yang*.

In the case of menopause, Kidney Essence is diminishing. There is insufficient Kidney Water to nourish Heart, so Heart Fire is hyperactive. This causes symptoms like hot flashes, night sweats, poor sleep and mood swings etc. This is the disharmony between Heart and Kidney. For the treatment, we should harmonise Heart and Kidney and balance *yin* and *yang*.

In modern medicine, menopause syndrome is due to a decrease in sexual hormones. Usually there is a balance between the

central nervous system and the sexual hormones. A change in the hormones results in a reaction within the central nervous system. That is why it is normal for a woman to become slightly emotional before her period arrives. It is the brain's reaction to the changing hormonal ratio between oestrogen and progesterone. During menopause, there is a huge change in the hormones, and for some women, their brain reacts dramatically, which causes symptoms.

In TCM, the brain is an organ that is overlooked. In ancient China anatomical knowledge was limited, therefore most of the brain's function goes to Heart. In our modern practice of TCM and acupuncture, I believe that developing our knowledge and skills based on traditional theories can enhance our clinical results.

From my experience, I have determined that in this context Heart is equivalent to brain (central nervous system), while Kidney equates to ovaries. So, to harmonise Heart and Kidney is actually to adjust the balance between brain and ovaries. Consequently, we want to calm the brain, so it doesn't react strongly to the change of hormones. We also want to enhance the function of the ovaries, so the decline in hormone levels can be slower, allowing the brain to adjust. By doing this, we can achieve a new balance between central nervous system activity and a lower level of sexual hormones.

Modern medicine usually finds a lowered E₂ (oestradiol) and elevated FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) in menopause patients, this also indicates an imbalance between the pituitary gland (brain) and ovaries.

Point Selection

Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei*, Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong* and GB 20 *feng chi*: this group of points is located on the scalp and neck; they can promote more blood circulation to the brain and relax the tense central nervous system.

Ren 6 *qi hai*, Ren 4 *guan yuan*, St 29 *gui lai* and M-CA-18 *zi gong*: this group of points is located on the lower abdomen, they can bring more *qi* and Blood to the ovaries and so enhance their function.

P 6 *nei guan*, Ht 7 *shen men*, LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao* and Liv 3 *tai chong*: this group of points is traditionally applied to calm the *shen* and strengthen Kidney Essence.

Adjusting points according to the patients' age

For women between 40 and 50 years old, their *tian gui* is not yet exhausted; for them, the treatment should be more focused on Kidney (ovaries) to slow aging of the ovaries. The hope is that this will delay menopause.

For women between 50 and 60 years old, their *tian gui* is close to exhaustion. The treatment should focus on both Kidney (ovaries) and Heart (brain), so they can go through menopause without too many difficulties.

For women over 60, their *tian gui* is completely exhausted. There is no need to treat Kidney. The focus should be on calming the Heart. This is usually seen in women who have been taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) since their 40s or 50s. When stopping HRT in their 60s or even 70s, they develop severe hot flashes and night sweats. Acupuncture results in these cases are poor. Herbal therapy may give some relief.

I do not recommend needling abdominal points for women who have gone through radio/chemo therapies or are taking oestrogen suppressants due to breast/ovarian cancers, as these points would stimulate oestrogen and progesterone levels, which is contraindicated. Treatment should only focus on the brain.

Needling Techniques

I use even method. Electric stimulation can be applied from the second or third treatment. To stimulate the ovaries, I use electrical stimulation on St 29 *gui lai* and M-CA-18 *zi gong*. To calm the brain, I use electrical treatment on Du 24 *shen ting* and Du 20 *bai hui*.

In order to achieve lasting results from weekly treatment with acupuncture alone, it is necessary to apply a sufficiently strong stimulus. For this reason all of the points listed for a given case history were used with that patient on each occasion. Provided gentle stimulation is used (22 or 20 gauge needles), I find most patients can accept this.

Treatment Frequency

I recommend one treatment per week for most cases. For some severe cases, two visits for the first week and then once a week after that will provide better results.

Report of 30 cases of menopause syndrome

I analysed 30 cases of menopause syndrome that I treated from January to May of 2016, and can report as follows:

Patients' ages ranged from 42 to 62, the average age was 53.8 years old. They came for weekly or bi-weekly acupuncture treatment, for six consecutive sessions. The following results are based on how they felt after their sixth appointment.

Definition of Results

Significantly improved: symptoms are completely gone for over one week

Markedly effective: symptoms are over 80% better for over one week

Effective: symptoms are over 50% better for over one week

Ineffective: since menopause difficulties can self-recover over a certain period of time, for patients experiencing less than 50% improvement I consider the treatment was ineffective.

Results

	Cases	%
Significantly improved	16	53.33
Markedly effective	9	30
Effective	3	10
Ineffective	2	6.67
Total effect	28	93.33

Case Reports

1. Mahsa Z.

Age: 42.5 yrs

First visit: 16/01/16

Clinical Manifestations: No period for four months. Blood tests showed: oestradiol: 17, FSH: 89, TSH: 5.6. She had frequent hot flashes around ten times a day; night sweats around two to three times per night. She had been highly stressed emotionally. Pale tongue with tooth marks, thready pulse. She had started a low dose of Synthoid (Levothyroxine, a prescription medication given for hypothyroidism) two weeks before she came to see me.

Diagnosis: Pre-menopause syndrome (Heart and Kidney *qi* Deficiency)

Treatment Principle: Harmonising Heart and Kidney

Points: Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei* (ST8), Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong*, GB 20 *feng chi*, Ren 6 *qi hai*, Ren 4 *guan yuan*, St 29 *gui lai*, M-CA-18 *zi gong*, P 6 *nei guan* (P6), LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao*, Liv 3 *tai chong* and St 9 *ren ying*.

Results: Patient came for treatment once a week. Electric stimulation was added from the second treatment on St 29 *gui lai* and M-CA-18 *zi gong*. She started a period after the second treatment (January 24). No hot flashes and night sweats after third treatment. She began another period on February 13 (20 days after the previous period). In March she had another 20-day cycle and in April a 27-day cycle. The period then became regular. In April, her blood test showed: oestradiol: 170, FSH: 25, and TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone): 2.6.

2. Wendy K.

Age: 54.9 yrs
First Visit: 15/01/16

Clinical Manifestations: last period was one-and-a-half years ago. Frequent hot flashes, over ten times per day; night sweats over five times per night; poor sleep, mood swings, and fatigue; red tongue, less diminished coating, thready pulse.

Diagnosis: Menopause syndrome syndrome (disharmony between Heart Fire and Kidney *yin*).

Treatment principle: Harmonising Heart and Kidney.

Points: Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei*, Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong*, GB 20 *feng chi*, Ren 6 *qi hai*, Ren 4 *guan yuan*, St 29 *gui lai*, M-CA-18 *zi gong*, P 6 *nei guan*, Ht 7 *shen men*, LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao* and Liv 3 *tai chong*.

Method: Electrical stimulation was added from the second treatment on St 29 *gui lai* and M-CA-18 *zi gong*. She came for treatment once a week.

Results: after four treatments, hot flashes decreased to one to two times per day and night sweats to zero to one time per night. All symptoms were gone after the sixth treatment and the patient continued to feel well during six months follow-up.

3. Colleen Z.

Age: 62 yrs
First visit: 05/05/16

Clinical Manifestations: hives started six months ago with hot flashes, night sweats and poor sleep. No allergic factors were found on testing. Last period was a year ago. Red tongue with no coating. Wiry pulse.

Diagnosis: Heart and Kidney *yin* deficiency with internal Wind.

Treatment Principle: Harmonising Heart and Kidney.

Points: Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei*, Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong*, GB 20 *feng chi*, Ren 6 *qi hai*, Ren 4 *guan yuan*, P 6 *nei guan*, LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao*, Liv 3 *tai chong*, LI 11 *qu chi* and Sp 10 *xue hai*.

Results: after three treatments, the rashes were gone. After the fourth treatment, there were no hot flashes and no night sweats.

4. Lynette F.

Age: 45.9 yrs
First visit: 19/09/15

Clinical Manifestations: This patient had breast cancer treatment in 1999 and 2014. She had undergone a medically induced menopause. She was experiencing hot flashes over ten times a day and night sweats over five times per night. Red tongue with yellow greasy tongue coating. Wiry pulse.

Diagnosis: Stagnation of Damp-Heat, disharmony between Heart and Kidney

Treatment Principle: Harmonising Heart and Kidney

Points: Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei*, Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong*, GB 20 *feng chi*, P 6 *nei guan* (P6), LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao*, Liv 3 *tai chong*, St 40 *feng long* and Sp 9 *yin ling quan*.

Results: The patient came for treatment once a week. After six treatments, she was experiencing four hot flashes during the day, and these were less intense. She was waking twice per night with general warmth, but no night sweats.

5. Wanda T.

Age: 49.4 yrs
First visit: 04/03/16

Clinical Manifestations: Poor sleep (three hours per night) started three years ago when her periods stopped. Slight hot flashes, no night sweats. She was taking a low dose of HRT. She had just stopped Synthoid, which she had been taking for over 20 years, and replaced it with a natural thyroid support supplement. Red tongue, diminished coating, thready pulse.

Diagnosis: Disharmony between Heart and Kidney

Treatment Principle: Harmonising Heart and Kidney

Points: Du 24 *shen ting*, St 8 *tou wei*, Du 20 *bai hui*, M-HN-1 *si shen cong*, GB 20 *feng chi*, Ren 6 *qi hai*, Ren 4 *guan yuan*, St 29 *gui lai*, M-CA-18 *zi gong*, P 6 *nei guan*, LI 4 *he gu*, St 36 *zu san li*, Sp 6 *san yin jiao*, Liv 3 *tai chong* and St 9 *ren ying*.

Results: The patient came for treatment once a week. No electrical stimulation was added, because she was very sensitive. After six treatments, her sleep was around three to five hours per night. I think the relatively poor result might be related to the interfering effect of HRT, and the withdrawal of Synthoid.

DISCUSSION

Menopause syndrome is commonly seen in the modern practice of acupuncture. Western medicine usually prescribes hormone replacement therapy or anti-depressant drugs to control the symptoms. Due to the side effects of these drugs, many women will turn to alternative medicine for help.

In China, during the past few years, a number of widely different protocols have arisen to treat menopause syndrome with acupuncture. For example: Shurong Li¹ applied back-*shu* points. Hong Jin² applied five-*shu* points. Yufeng He³ applied abdominal acupuncture. Chengqiao Chen⁴ applied Ht 7 *shen men*, St 36 *zu san li* and Sp 6 *san yin jiao*. Zhanlin Sun⁵ applied auricular acupuncture.

In 2002, Xiaomin Shen⁶, supervised by Professor Xuemin Shi, applied the principle of regulating mentality and supplementing the Kidney to treat menopause syndrome. In his study, his approach assumed the mechanism of menopause syndrome is disharmony between brain and Kidney. He selected Du 16 *feng fu*, Du 20 *bai hui*, Ren 6 *qi hai* and Bl 23 *shen shu* to replenish Kidney and regulate brain. In his animal research, acupuncture markedly improved E₂ (oestradiol) and decreased FSH and LH. This research indicated that acupuncture could regulate the axis of hypothalamus-pituitary gland-ovaries, so as to create a new balance between E₂, FSH and LH (luteinising hormone).

In China I worked in the acupuncture department of the First Teaching Hospital of Tianjin University of TCM, a hospital which is famous for the treatment of brain-related disorders, such as stroke. There, the work of Xiaomin Shen inspired me to use the combined treatment of ovaries and brain for menopause syndrome.

With regard to the results of this study, theoretically one might expect that the younger the patient is, the better the result should be. However, in my practice, I have found that a patient's individual (and less predictable) reaction to acupuncture plays a bigger role in the prognosis. An important factor here would seem to be the patient's intake of chemical or bio-identical hormones before or during treatment, which may reduce the acupuncture response.

TEXT REFERENCES

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