

Bleeding Techniques: Ancient Treatments for Acupuncture Physicians

An ancient Chinese treatment technique that can apply to many conditions the modern-day practitioner may be hesitant to use in his or her treatment plans is bloodletting. Perhaps there is reluctance to use this method due to the drawing of blood, which can transmit blood-borne pathogens; there may also be some concern about causing the patient potential discomfort. However, bleeding is a specialized technique for specific conditions that can produce effective and dramatic results when the patient's condition is diagnosed properly and the bleeding method expertly executed.

Bloodletting has four major therapeutic aims that are useful in the clinical arena:

1. It can invigorate the smooth flow of *qi* and blood, thereby picking up and facilitating its flow when the *qi* and blood need invigoration. An example of this scenario occurs when a patient presents with a wiry pulse and mild feelings of stagnation that indicate *qi* stagnation.
2. It disperses *qi* and blood stasis, as in cases of backache or spider veins.
3. It can drain excess heat and fire. Such excess includes pathogenic factors, as in an invasion of the Lung by wind heat that produces a fever and extremely sore throat.
4. Finally, bleeding can bring down yang rising, as in the varieties of high blood pressure due to Liver yang rising. (Note: not all cases of high blood pressure have this etiology).

There are numerous clinical conditions suitable to treat with bleeding that have the aforementioned differentiations. Some of these conditions are outlined later in this article to remind the practitioner of bleeding's clinical applicability.

The most common acupuncture points to bleed are those with shallow insertion depths, such as ear acupuncture points, scalp points and *jing* (well) points. Other points that can be bled are those with energetics that lend themselves to bleeding, such as BL 40 (*weizhong*), to release summer heat; the ear apex point for acute conjunctivitis; or local points for pathologies such as bruises or varicosities.

There are three types of bleeding techniques. The first is called the "spot-pricking or collateral (pertaining to meridian) pricking method." With this style, a discrete point or spot is bled, such as a *jing* (well) point like LI 1 (*shangyang*) to relieve a toothache due to excess heat, or LU 11 (*shaoshang*) to treat a sore throat due to excess heat.

The second method is called the "clumping or area-pricking method." With this approach, pinprick motions are made on a relatively large scale, such as GV 14 (*dazhui*) to reduce excess heat in the Lungs, as in the case of pneumonia.

The last type of bleeding is called the "pinching method." With this technique, the point to be treated is pinched between the thumb and index finger. This action isolates the point and promotes venous pooling, which facilitates bleeding. Bladder 2 (*zanzhu*) is a common point to pinch and bleed for sinus congestion or headache.

As efficacious as it is, bleeding is contraindicated for certain conditions. One of the most important prohibitions is that it is not suitable for yin-deficient (false) heat. In this case, bleeding can actually weaken the patient, as the heat is not real, but arises from deficiency. In general, patients with diabetes; bleeding disorders such as hemophilia; or patients who may bleed easily (such as those on blood thinners) should not be bled. Bleeding contraindications also apply to patients who are extremely weakened, anemic, hypotensive or pregnant. Depending on the point to be treated, the patient can be bled either in a sitting position for bleeding a *jing* (well) point, or in a reclining position to pinch BL 2.

Prior to bleeding, the practitioner should have all of the required treatment tools within the working area. Next, the hands are washed, and a clean field is established with paper towels or professional toweling, upon which are placed dry sterile cotton balls, alcohol preps, tight fitting latex gloves and the bleeding tool of choice. Off of the field, have an open biohazard "sharps" container; a biohazard trash container; extra latex gloves; and goggles and facemask, in the event of excessive bleeding. Don a double pair of tight-fitting gloves to guard against the transmission of infectious blood-borne pathogens. As always, the point to be bled is swabbed with 70 percent isopropyl alcohol and allowed to dry naturally.

Bleeding tools include the regular acupuncture or filiform needle; a medical lancet; the *shoni-shin* needle (or Japanese pediatric needle); the traditional three-edge needle; or the plum blossom needle (seven-star or cutaneous needle). If using the spot-pricking or pinching method, the discomfort of bleeding can virtually be eliminated via a rapid insertion to the desired shallow depth of about 0.05-0.1 *cun*. Elicit 1-2 drops of blood (some practitioners say up to 10) by squeezing the point. Absorb the blood with sterile cotton, and dispose in the biohazard trash container along with the used gloves. If there is so much blood in the cotton ball that it can be wrung out, it must be disposed of in the biohazard sharps unit. If the bleeding tool is not reusable, dispose of it immediately in the sharps container after pricking the point. Place a Band-Aid on almost all points that are bled (i.e., distal *jing* points) to allow them to heal and to prevent infection, and then wash your hands.

The frequency of bleeding is contingent upon the patient's medical condition. If the patient has an excess heat condition such as tonsillitis, bleeding can be performed once a day until the symptom abates. If the patient has a blood stasis condition, bleeding can be done 1-2 times per week.

The table below summarizes common points amenable to bleeding, the style of bleeding to use, and clinical conditions suitable to the bleeding technique.

Points	Bleeding Method	Clinical Conditions
LU 11 (<i>shaoshang</i>)	Spot	Sore throat of the excess type; exogenous invasions tonsillitis; stuffiness and pain in the chest; asthmatic breathing; stomach ache; frontal shoulder pain
LI 1 (<i>shangyang</i>)	Spot	Toothache; sore throat; nasal obstruction; seasonal allergies; tinnitus; frontal headache; stomach ache; shoulder pain
HT 9 (<i>shaochong</i>)	Spot	Febrile diseases; stuffiness and pain in the chest; palpitations; angina pectoris; insomnia; headache; tinnitus; shoulder pain; back pain; heart attack
SI 1 (<i>shaoze</i>)	Spot	Febrile diseases; breast disorders

BL 2 (<i>zanzhu</i>)	Pinch	Wind-heat in the eyes; acute conjunctivitis; sinus pressure and headache
BL 40 (<i>weizhong</i>)	Pinch	Back pain; acute lumbar sprain; multiple furuncles and swelling; sunstroke; leg pain
BL 67 (<i>zhiyin</i>)	Spot	Back pain along the Bladder channel
PC 3 (<i>quze</i>)	Spot	Febrile diseases; acute vomiting
PC 9 (<i>zhongchong</i>)	Spot	Coma; unconsciousness; stuffiness and pain in the chest; palpitations; angina; insomnia; stomach problems; pain in the liver region
TE 1 (<i>guanchong</i>)	Spot	Tinnitus; migraines; sore throat; shoulder pain; back pain; pain in the chest and hypochondriac region; hepatic distending pain
LR 1 (<i>dadun</i>)	Spot	Irritability; red eyes; high blood pressure; Liver (vertex) headaches; genital pain
GV 4 (<i>mingmen</i>)	Pinch	Lumbago
GV 14 (<i>dazhui</i>) and its <i>huatoujiajis</i>	Pinch	Lung heat (excess); pneumonia; febrile diseases
Extra Points		
<i>Yintang</i>	Pinch	Headache; cerebral infarction
<i>Taiyang</i>	Pinch	Headache at the temple area
Ear apex	Pinch	High blood pressure; acute conjunctivitis; spasms; high fever caused by toxicity, wind, heat, Liver yang rising
<i>Jinjin</i> and <i>yuyue</i> (veins under the tongue)	Pinch	Pernicious vomiting; morning sickness; aphasia
<i>Shixuan</i> (tips of fingers)	Spot	Coma; epilepsy; infantile convulsion; convulsions; sunstroke
<i>Sifeng</i> (midpoint of interphalangeal joints of all fingers except thumb)	Spot	Digestive disorders in children (prick when purple)
<i>Baxie</i> (junction of margin of webs of fingers)	Spot	Spasm and contracture of fingers (pathologic fluid may come out)
Other		
Spider veins	Spot	On the face, for sinus congestion
Local points	Spot	As in herpes zoster: for herpes above the waist, use LU 11; for herpes below the waist, use SP 1; sprains on chest wall
<i>Jing</i> (well) points	Spot	In general for resuscitation; coma; apoplexy; mental disorders; sore throat; toothache; chest fullness. Specifically, see <i>jing</i> points listed above
<i>Luo</i> points for acute local swelling	Clumping	Swollen ankles, etc.
Hypertension groove on the ear	Pinch	High blood pressure due to Liver yang rising
Point Combinations		
LI 4 (<i>hegu</i>), LI 11 (<i>quchi</i>)	Pinch or clump	Numbness

ST 36 (<i>zusanli</i>); GV 26 (<i>shuigou</i>); PC 3 (<i>quze</i>); BL 40 (<i>weizhong</i>); PC 6 (<i>neiguan</i>)	Clump	Hypertension
BL 40 (<i>weizhong</i>); LU 5 (<i>chize</i>); ST 44 (<i>neiting</i>); PC 3 (<i>quze</i>)	Spot or pinch	Sunstroke; food poisoning; acute gastroenteritis
GB 14 (<i>yangbai</i>); ST 4 (<i>dicing</i>); ST 6 (<i>jiache</i>); SI 18 (<i>quanliao</i>)	Clump or pinch	Facial paralysis
GV 14 (<i>dazhui</i>); BL 12 (<i>fengmen</i>); BL 15 (<i>xinshu</i>); BL 17 (<i>geshu</i>); BL 20 (<i>pishu</i>)	Clump or pinch	Relapsing urticaria
GV 2 (<i>yushu</i>); BL 32 (<i>ciliao</i>); BL 25 (<i>dachangshu</i>)	Clump	Acute hemorrhoids
GV 20 (<i>baihui</i>) and <i>ashi</i> points	Clump	Press GV 20 and bleed <i>ashi</i> points for stiff neck
LI 11 (<i>quchi</i>); LI 4 (<i>hegu</i>); SP 6 (<i>sanyinjiao</i>); LR 2 (<i>xingxian</i>); ST 44 (<i>neiting</i>)	Clump or pinch	Eczema
LR 5 (<i>ligou</i>); ST 40 (<i>fenglong</i>); BL 13 (<i>feishu</i>); GV 14 (<i>dazhui</i>)	Spot	Damp-heat eczema
BL 17 (<i>geshu</i>); BL 20 (<i>pishu</i>); ST 36 (<i>zusanli</i>)	Clump or pinch	Skin problems due to wind-dryness (blood deficiency)

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