



ACUPUNCTURE

Sleep as Medicine: Resting the Heart

POINT COMBINATIONS TO ADDRESS WIND COLD / WIND HEAT INVASIONS & PROMOTE QUALITY SLEEP.

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A patient recently sent me an article from the *The Los Angeles Times* concerning issues with "long COVID."¹ The article essentially discusses the importance of rest and sleep while recovering from viral infection. My patient handed me the article and said, "This is exactly what you always say! Sleep is medicine!" I was happy to see this article touch on fundamental concepts of health. Two quotes stood out to me:

- "Sleep equals immunity. You want to have your immune system not distracted by anything else." — *Dr. Susan Cheng, Cedar-Sinai Medical Center*
- "Getting adequate sleep lets the immune system rebalance. ... At a minimum, you should really unplug for three to five days." — *Dr. Caitlin McAuley, Keck Medicine of USC*

These quotes may seem like common sense; however, I rarely encounter patients who take the time to rest and heal when experiencing sickness. (Over)working from home, "not having time to be sick," and expecting herbal medicine / acupuncture to "magically" expedite the healing process so the race / pace of life can restart are much more common, in my clinical experience.

True Healing Begins With Sleep Health



I continuously educate my patients on the importance of sleep and how sleep hygiene is as important as diet, acupuncture and herbal medicine. When encountering acute cases of wind cold / wind heat invasions, clinicians often rush to prescribe herbal medicines and administer acupuncture protocols to target only the presenting symptoms. This approach is sound medicine and often extremely effective; however, one aspect of therapy I strongly emphasize in cases such as these is deep rest / deep sleep.

Taking herbal medicines or administering acupuncture to quickly heal a patient so he / she can rush back to work is not always "good medicine." I am not saying clinicians ignore treating the symptoms of wind cold / wind heat invasion; I'm suggesting clinicians should *first* educate patients on the importance of sleep in the recovery process, and then perhaps add herbal medicines / acupuncture point protocols as needed to help support deep, restorative sleep.

This is not a complicated protocol to implement for patients. It can be as simple as having patients take their patent medicines with chamomile / lavender flower tea or adding some TCM herbs for calming the *shen* to formulas / adding a patent medicine for sleep issues. In addition, let's discuss some possible options for acupuncture point protocols that help calm the *shen* while targeting the patterns of wind cold / wind heat invasion.

Resting the Heart: Acupoint Combinations

The *Su Wen* (Chapter 8) states: "*The Heart holds the office of Sovereign; the bright spirit arises from it. ... Therefore, when the ruler is enlightened, there is peace below, and life-nurturing will result in long life and avoid danger throughout life. ... If the ruler is not enlightened, then the pathways become blocked, the body is greatly damaged, and life-nurturing will end in disaster.*"

The heart holding the office of sovereign in TCM has important clinical implications when assisting a patient in the healing process of almost any "dis-ease," whether acute or chronic in nature. For

example, here are two acupuncture protocols I commonly use for wind cold / wind heat acute presentations, which include points to calm the *shen* and target the heart meridian:

- *Wind cold invasion: Lu 7 + BL 12 + Du 16 + Du 24 + HT 7.* This point prescription expels wind, circulates the *wei qi*, releases the exterior, calms the mind, and nourishes heart blood. All actions target the wind cold invasion while helping the patient experience deep, restorative sleep. The two-point addition of *Du 24* and *HT 7* is an excellent combination to calm the mind and improve sleep quality.
- *Wind heat invasion: LU 7 + LI 4 + LI 11 + Du 14 + GB 20 + BL 15 + BL 17.* This point prescription expels wind, releases the exterior, clears heat, cools the blood, dispels blood stasis, and calms the mind. The two-point addition of *BL 15* and *BL 17* is an excellent combination to target the heart organ as well as the heart meridian, moving the blood and calming the mind, which greatly improves quality of sleep.

Clinical Takeaway

It's time to reawaken and broaden your clinical vision of the importance of sleep in the healing process of wind cold / wind heat invasions. In my opinion, the primary reason we see "long illness" is most often due to patients not taking the time to rest and heal.

The old saying, "I don't have time to be sick," is taking on new life as more and more patients embrace the "work from home" model. We must show our patients compassion as they express their worries concerning life stress and work stress related to sickness; yet we must also show them the importance of sleep for both short-term and long-term healing.

This simple action of teaching the concept of "sleep as medicine" can transform patients' lives and open the doorway to deep, restorative healing.

Reference

1. Reyes EA. "Got COVID? Doctors Warn Powering Through It — Even From Home — Can Worsen Health Toll." *The Los Angeles Times*, July 7, 2022.

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