

Chinese Pediatric Massage: The Subtle Medicine

Michael Clifford

Chinese pediatric massage (CPM) has an ancient history. Along with acupuncture, the Chinese elders realized the effectiveness of massage for healing a great variety of ailments. The earliest available written manuscript of CPM is from the Sui/Tang dynasty (581-907 CE). The ancient scholar Sun Si Mao wrote about several infantile diseases and outlined external herbal therapies for each. During the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), Dr. Qiang Zhong Yang expanded the differentiation of childhood disease in three volumes of *Key to the Treatment of Children's Diseases*. During the last millennium, the practice of Chinese pediatric massage has grown in scope of practice and differentiation of infantile diseases. It is even more effective in combination with Chinese herbal medicine.

One difference between allopathic (or Western) pediatric treatment and CPM is the emphasis on teaching the parent how to perform many of the massage techniques so the child will receive more consistent treatments and will not need to return to the health care provider's office as often. Another difference is that traditional Chinese medicine strongly believes in "treating the mother to treat the child," especially with newborn infant and breast-feeding babies. In a literal sense, the energetic nourishment is passed through the mother to the child; however, this connection lasts far past the breastfeeding stage of infancy. Sometimes the most direct and effective way to treat the child is to incorporate treatment of the mother.

The specific treatment style depends on the disease or complaint being treated. In general, however, the massage is very light, and commonly focuses on the child's hands, arms, abdomen and back. Most children quickly relax and enjoy the massage, smiling and laughing with the acupuncturist. Traditionally, most of the work is done with hands, however in some cases the procedure of choice may involve some acupuncture needles on specific points. In CPM treatments, the needles are not retained; just a quick, painless insertion and removal of the tiny needle.

Because children are so active and "energetic" (in a literal and figurative sense), they tend to respond very quickly to massage. This is good news to the parents, as a child with diarrhea, for example, will often respond immediately and return to normal bowel movement patterns that day. For a different example, a child with a high fever will often have the fever drop before the child leaves the office.

The list of diseases CPM can effectively treat is exhaustive. A partial lists of ailments CPM can treat includes: abdominal pain or distension; attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); asthma; bedwetting; (non-traumatic) nose bleeds; bronchitis; chicken pox; the common cold; constipation; infantile convulsions; diabetes; diarrhea; poor digestion; dysentery; earaches; epilepsy; fevers; headaches; jaundice; malnutrition; measles; mumps; night terrors; excess perspiration; phlegm conditions; sore throats; teething; toothaches; frequent urination; vomiting; whooping cough; and many more pediatric ailments.

As always, a parent or caregiver of a child has to know when the child can benefit from complementary

medicine and when the child needs to be treated with allopathic medicine. Children do not have the reserves to fight a prolonged disease as well as an adult, and some of the childhood diseases can go from acute to critical, requiring emergency care in just a few short hours. Once a parent/caregiver becomes familiar with CPM, he/she can make a more informed decision about which treatment modality is appropriate for the child. With the parent/caregiver's written permission, there can be coordinated care between the allopathic doctor and the acupuncturist providing pediatric massage.

Once you know the ability of CPM to effectively treat many childhood ailments, you can seek quality complementary holistic treatments for infants throughout childhood and beyond.

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