

Treatment of Multiple Sclerosis by Scalp Acupuncture

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Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a progressive disease of the central nervous system in which communication between the brain and other parts of the body is disrupted. There are multiple scars on the myelin sheaths comprised of a fatty layer surrounding and protecting the neurons of the brain and spinal cord. Myelin allows for the smooth, high-speed transmission of electrochemical messages between the brain, the spinal cord and the rest of the body. When myelin is destroyed or damaged, the ability of the nerves to conduct electrical impulses to and from the brain is disrupted, which causes the various symptoms of MS. Approximately 300,000 people in the U.S. and 2.5 million people worldwide suffer from MS. It primarily affects adults, with age of onset typically between 20 and 40 years, and is twice as common in women compared to men.

The effects of MS can range from relatively benign in most cases to somewhat disabling. However, the symptoms for some are devastating. Symptoms and signs of MS vary widely depending on the location of the affected myelin sheaths. Common symptoms may include numbness, tingling or weakness in one or more limbs, partial or complete loss of vision, double or blurring of vision, tremor, loss of balance and mobility, unsteady gait, fatigue and dizziness. Some patients also might develop muscle stiffness or spastically, paralysis, slurred speech, dysfunction of urine or bowel, depression and cognitive impairment. MS is unpredictable and varies in severity. In some patients it is a mild illness, but it can lead to permanent disability in others. In the worst cases, patients with MS may be unable to write, speak or walk.

MS can occur either in discrete attacks or slowly over time. Although systems functioning may resolve completely between episodes, permanent neurological problems usually persist, especially as the disease progresses. Many risk factors for MS have been identified, but no definitive cause has been found. Currently, MS does not have a cure in terms of conventional treatments. However, a number of therapies can be used to treat the disease symptomatically.

Scalp acupuncture has been proven to have the most success in the treatment of MS and other central nerve damages, as compared to other acupuncture modalities including ear acupuncture, body acupuncture and hand acupuncture. It not only can improve the symptoms, the patient's quality of life, and slow the progression of physical disability, but also can reduce the number of relapses. Scalp acupuncture, discovered by Dr. Jiao Shunfa in 1971, is a modern acupuncture technique combining traditional needling methods with Western medical knowledge of representative areas of the cerebral cortex, including anatomy, physiology, pathology and neurology.

Scalp acupuncture treatment for MS has had much success in reducing numbness and pain, decreasing spasms, improving weakness and paralysis of limbs and improving balance. Many patients also have reported that their bladder and bowel control, fatigue and overall sense of well-being

significantly improved after treatment. Recent studies have shown that scalp acupuncture could be a very effective modality in controlling MS. Scalp acupuncture often produces remarkable results after just a few needles are inserted. It usually relieves symptoms immediately, and sometimes only takes several minutes to achieve remarkable results.

Scalp acupuncture areas may be chosen according to the patient's particular symptoms. The primary acupuncture areas for patients with motor problems such as paralysis, weakness of limbs or abnormal sensations in limbs, including tingling, numbness or pain, are the motor area and the sensory and foot-motor areas. Those areas should be inserted with needles and stimulated unilaterally or bilaterally, according to the patient's manifestations. Select the balance area or dizziness area of the scalp, respectively, depending on which symptom the patient manifests. The tremor area of the head should be chosen if patients have limb spasm. Many patients had a very quick positive response in controlling urine and bowel functions when the foot-motor and sensory area is stimulated.

Rotate the needles at least 200 times per minute with the thumb and index finger for one to three minutes. The needles should be twirled as vigorously as the patient can tolerate and repeated every 10 minutes. During the treatment, some patients may have the sensations of some or all of the following: hot, cold, tingling, numbness, heaviness or distending, or the sensation of water or electricity moving along the spine, legs or arms. Those patients with some or all of these sensations usually respond and improve more quickly. However, those who do not have such sensations still could have immediate positive results. Keep the needles inserted for 30 to 45 minutes; the treatment should be administered two to three times per week and a therapeutic course consists of 10 treatments.

There are many different acupuncture techniques to treat MS. Although scalp acupuncture has the fastest track record for improving symptoms, other techniques are also necessary for further improvement. Regular body acupuncture, electric acupuncture and moxibustion, as well as physical therapy and massage, can combine with scalp acupuncture to speed up the time of recovery. Regular acupuncture treatment has been found to have a positive therapeutic effect on the recovery of movements and abnormal sensations of the hands, fingers, feet and toes. Commonly used points are GB-34, LI-3, K-3, *ba feng* for lower limbs at LI-11, LI-4, SJ-5, and *ba xie* for upper-limb work. Electrical stimulation is very helpful if the practitioner has difficulty performing the needle rotation more than 200 times per minute. It is suggested that no more than two of the scalp needles be stimulated at any session so the brain does not become too confused to respond. Moxibustion can enhance the therapeutic results of scalp acupuncture, especially for older or weak patients. Recommended points are St-36, Sp-6, CV-4, K-1 and UB-23.

Although there certainly are other acupuncture techniques that can be effective, scalp acupuncture seems to be a more effective model in bringing about quicker and often immediate improvements. In a recent investigation, scalp acupuncture was applied to 16 patients with limb pain at Southwest Rehabilitation Hospital and National Healthcare Center in Albuquerque, N.M. After only one treatment per patient, eight of the 16 patients instantly showed significant improvement (49 percent), six patients showed some improvement (38 percent), and only two patients showed no improvement (13 percent), thus yielding a total effective rate of 87 percent.

Case Study 1: Burning and Stabbing Pain

A 52-year-old female received scalp acupuncture treatment at Southwest Rehabilitation Hospital. After the first symptoms occurred in January 2007, the patient was finally diagnosed with MS in August of

that same year. Although various types of medications were provided, she experienced little improvement. The patient described severe burning and stabbing pain throughout her whole body that interrupted her sleep and caused loss of emotional control. She also had occipital headaches and loss of balance that made her unable to walk or turn around. The examination revealed that she could not stand still if her eyes were closed; and she could not turn around, stand on one leg or walk from toe to heel. The movements of touching her nose and touching both index fingers together were only accomplished slowly and with great effort. Her tongue was red and somewhat purple, with a thin white coating. The pulse was wiry and thready.

As soon as she underwent scalp acupuncture treatment, she started to feel the sensations of energy moving down her lower back, followed by heat sensations in her feet. Three minutes later, the burning and stabbing pain diminished considerably. She only felt some of those sensations in her right hip and abdominal area. After 12 minutes had passed, the sensation of burning and stabbing in her entire body had disappeared almost completely, except for some mild sensations in her abdomen. The patient was so excited to feel such dramatic results that she could not wait to test her movements. She was very surprised to find that she had no problem standing with her eyes closed, standing on either leg with the other one raised, walking in a straight line, and turning around without loss of balance. Also, she could now touch her nose and touch her index fingers together like a normal person. By the end of the treatment, her occipital headache had disappeared as well. This patient was happy to tell other MS patients that she felt like a "normal" person (physically and emotionally) after only one scalp acupuncture treatment.

Case Study 2: Paralysis

A 55-year-old female in a wheelchair received scalp acupuncture treatment. After the first symptoms occurred in 1990, the patient finally was diagnosed with MS in 2002. Both of her legs had started to become weak and heavy in the 1990s. Within three years, she was almost paralyzed and finally could not walk at all. The examination revealed she could not stand up straight due to the weakness in her legs, and she was unable to lift her right foot, so she had to drag it behind her while walking. Her tongue was red with a thin white coating; and her pulses were thready and wiry, with weak pulses in the kidney positions.

After four needles were inserted in her scalp, the patient experienced some tingling and electrical sensations in both of her legs. Five minutes later, she felt the urge to move both legs. After exercising her legs by bending and extending them, she was able to stand up straight and walk, free to lift both her feet almost normally. Although it took a lot of effort, she was amazed to be able to walk. At first she needed two people to assist her, then only one person, and finally she was able to walk by herself.

Case Study 3: Dizziness and Vertigo

A 60-year-old female received scalp acupuncture treatment. After the first symptoms occurred at age 20, the patient finally was diagnosed with MS in 1994. Her major symptoms were dizziness and vertigo accompanied by temple headaches that gradually became worse over the next seven years. Sometimes her vertigo was so severe that she felt as if the whole room was spinning violently, which caused her to fall down easily even when she was just standing. Her quality of life was completely diminished, as she had to spend whole days flat on her back with her eyes closed in order to avoid any movement of her head, which aggravated the vertigo. The onset of dizziness and vertigo were exacerbated whenever she changed her position in bed or even moved her head a little bit.

A few years before, the patient had received more than 15 acupuncture treatments from various doctors but experienced little improvement. Upon examination, it was found that her tongue was red with a thick white coating and she had wiry and thready pulses. After two needles were inserted in each temple, the patient reported that she felt some weird sensations in her head that she did not know how to describe. As the doctor stimulated the needles in her head, she was able to explain that it felt like a curtain in front of her eyes had opened. These sensations made her mind clear and her temple headache disappeared. Soon after, her vertigo and dizziness diminished significantly. She moved her head upward, downward, to the left and to the right, testing whether her dizziness and vertigo really were gone. Finally, she announced, "I believe I do not have any dizziness and vertigo anymore. And this was only my first scalp acupuncture treatment!"

Although MS still is an incurable disease of the central nervous system, scalp acupuncture provides an important complementary/alternative treatment approach for improving many MS symptoms and the patient's quality of life by slowing or reversing the progression of physical disability and reducing the number of relapses. By directly stimulating affected areas of the central nervous system, scalp acupuncture has showed more effective results compared to other acupuncture techniques. Our studies showed that 87 percent of the patients had instant improvements after only one scalp acupuncture treatment. The study also demonstrated that scalp acupuncture treatment for MS is accessible, less expensive, safer, more effective, and caused fewer side effects. Scalp acupuncture not only benefits patients with MS, but also significantly helps us to better understand the mechanisms that cause the condition. It may guide us to the discovery of new effective treatments and hopefully to a cure for this disease in the future.

Resources

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