

acupuncture case study

Insomnia: Is there any hope?

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History

Anna K. is a 54 year old female experiencing one-year history of insomnia. She doesn't report a specific incident or traumatic event that triggered the insomnia, rather it was something that happened slowly over time. Anna has no medical conditions or relevant medical history.

Symptoms

Anna usually wakes between 3 and 4 A.M. and finds it difficult to fall back to sleep. She occasionally remembers her dreams. She feels that her level of mental energy during the day is poor, feels drowsy, and sometimes suffers from dizziness and poor memory. Her food intake is less than average and she has abdominal distention after eating. She has general lassitude but is not restless and has no feelings of fever or cold. She is not thirsty. Urination and bowel movements are normal.

Previous treatments rendered

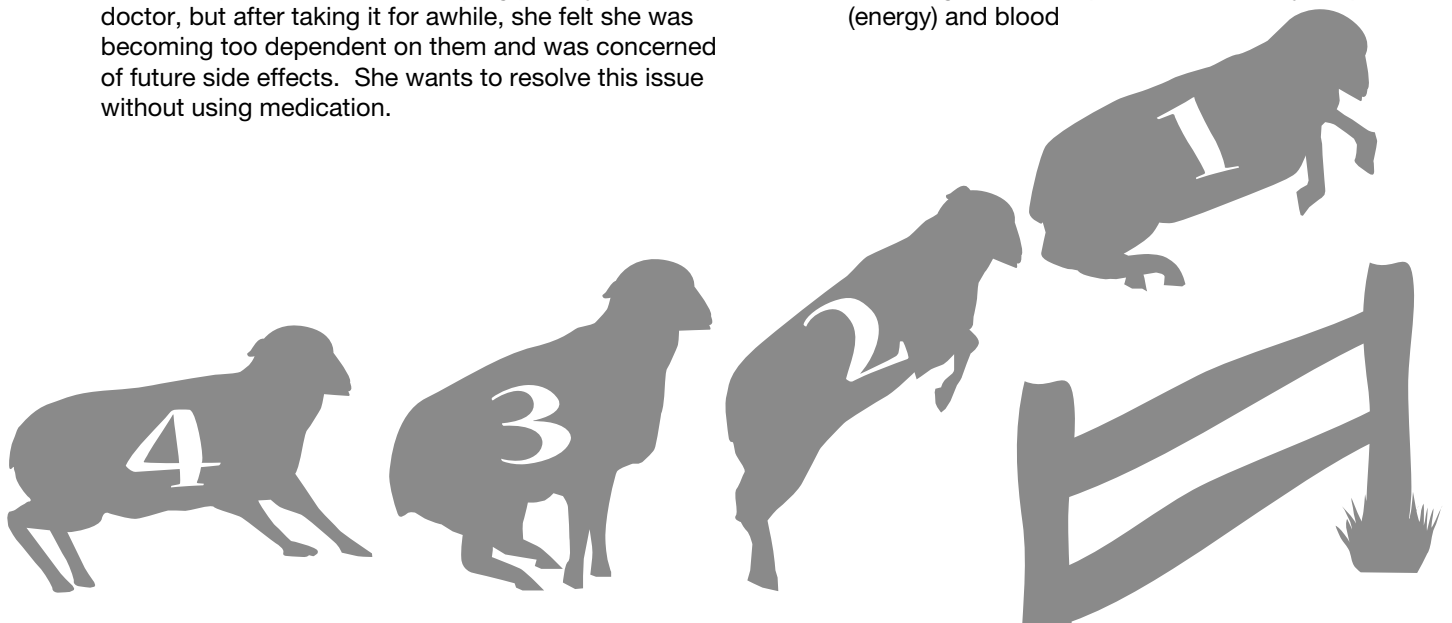
Anna was prescribed some sleeping pills by her medical doctor, but after taking it for awhile, she felt she was becoming too dependent on them and was concerned of future side effects. She wants to resolve this issue without using medication.

Physical examination

In Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), I approach the patient by observing her face and behavior. Anna's lips were a little pale and her eyes looked tired. Her speech was weak in volume and her energy appeared on the low side. I asked her many questions about her medical history and symptoms and I looked at her tongue and felt her pulse on both side of the wrists. The tongue and pulse taking is essential in TCM for they can indicate the state of organs and body by different characteristics shown. Anna's tongue color was pale with a thin white coating and her pulse was thin and moderate.

Analysis of the symptoms in Traditional Chinese Medicine:

1. Early morning waking and difficulty falling back to sleep---malnourishment of the spirit
2. Dizziness and poor memory---blood deficiency
3. General lassitude, fatigue, reduced food intake and abdominal distention---dysfunction of the Spleen
4. Pale tongue and thin pulse----deficiency of qi (energy) and blood



Basic theory of case:

In the natural environment there is a constant succession of day following night, the day being governed by 'yang' and the night by 'yin'. In the individual there is a similar flow of energy, sleep is governed by yin and waking by yang.

During the day, the yang qi is strong in the environment, and in the body the qi moves outwards to flow strongly in the yang channels. This energy keeps people alert and awake and enables them to carry out their normal daytime activities. When it begins to get dark, the yang qi in the environment declines and in the body, the yang qi turns inwards, causing people to relax and become quieter and less active. When the yang of the body completely enters the yin aspect the individual will fall asleep. According to TCM theory, normal sleep is therefore controlled by two aspects, yin and yang, which must be balanced by each other. The heart has the function of housing the spirit and when it is peaceful, the individual will sleep soundly.

Insomnia occurs when this coordination is lost and the spirit becomes disturbed. The cause of the disease is deficiency of qi and blood. Insomnia and poor memory are the main symptoms, suggesting a disorder of the heart channel. The poor appetite, abdominal distention and low energy indicate the involvement of the spleen. According to TCM theory, Anna's insomnia is differentiated as Spleen Qi deficiency and Heart Blood deficiency.

TCM treatment principles:

1. Tonify the Spleen Qi
2. Nourish the Heart
3. Calm the mind

My acupuncture treatment involves inserting very thin sterile needles in points in the body that correspond to tonifying the spleen Qi, nourishing the heart and calming the mind. There is a combination of several acupoints (from 10-12 points) that are located along the leg, hand, head and middle of the abdomen. They are quite painless and calming due to the acupressure stimulation. Needles at points are retained for 20 minutes while the patient lies down comfortably in a quiet room.

Anna responded almost instantly to the treatment. She felt quite relaxed during the treatment and almost fell asleep. Once the needles were removed, she felt "mentally better" and I told her to observe her sleeping pattern for the next two evenings. At her next session, she observed that she slept much longer throughout the night before waking up around 5am and during the second night, she did wake up, but it was a bit easier for her to fall back to sleep. I treated her almost twice a week for three weeks and she began to sleep an additional 2-3 hours every night. Her energy was improved and her spirit was clear. After two more treatments of once a week, Anna was sleeping well and only occasionally woke up early in the morning. She had better appetite and no abdominal distention. Her body felt stronger and better. She now comes to see me every three months for maintenance and follow-up. This involves one to two treatments depending on her personal maintenance of health through proper nutrition and exercise.

Anna's testimony

"After suffering from sleepless nights and feeling tired throughout the day, I decided that enough is enough. I didn't want to be dependent on the sleeping pills and I didn't feel comfortable knowing that I may one day suffer from side effects from the pills. So, I sought out help. I passed by the Adelaide Health Clinic while going to the gym one day and I set up an appointment with Dr. Jummy Kim. She gave me a free 15 minute consultation the first time I met her and was relieved to find out that the needles were almost 100% painless and much smaller-looking than what I imagined! I received the acupuncture treatment soon after. Jummy was quite gentle as she reassured me that I will not be in pain and just close my eyes and breathe deeply while lying in bed. I couldn't believe that in one minute time I had 12 needles on my body and I felt nothing but a tingling -good sensation in my body. I closed my eyes and after twenty minutes, Jummy returned and removed all of them so quickly and so smoothly. I was impressed and more importantly, I felt better while getting out of the treatment room. I never believed that I would get good sleep until now. I am happier and I feel better. I don't really understand how it all works but she did explain that treatment involves balancing the yin and yang and boosting the Qi and blood. Jummy's acupuncture does work and I am happy because I can sleep better."



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