

Acupuncture / Traditional Chinese Medicine

A Natural Alternative to Managing Symptoms of Menopause

by: Dr. Jummy Kim

History

Lin is female and 48 years old. She had been experiencing major discomfort from hot flashes throughout the day, sometimes as often as once or twice an hour. Lin described her hot flashes as "a surge of heat, coming on all of a sudden." Her other symptoms included a constant craving for sweets, memory loss, difficulty concentrating, and restless sleep. She had suffered from menstrual irregularities for two years, with menstruation occurring from twice a month, to once every three months. The flow also varied, and was sometimes heavy. For the past two months, she had low-grade fevers in the afternoons. Her lower back and knees were sore and weak. Her tongue was red without coating and her pulse was wiry, thin and rapid. In light of her discomfort and pain, Lin, like many women, did not feel comfortable with conventional hormonal therapy. Instead, she turned to acupuncture and Chinese herbs as an alternative.

Traditional Chinese Medicine and Menopause:

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) views menopause as a period of natural transition in a woman's life, and also a time where the body's energy and hormones are in a state of flux. This often results in various symptoms which can range in severity from uncomfortable to debilitating.

In TCM, it is believed that the energy of the Kidney is declining during menopause. It is important to note that in TCM,

the Kidney is not viewed as solely an anatomical structure as in Western medicine. In TCM, each internal organ is not only an anatomical structure, but there is also a corresponding emotion, tissue, sensory organ, and element. In the case of the TCM Kidney, the associated element is water, the emotion is fear, the sensory organ is the ear, and the corresponding tissue is bone. In addition, 12 of the internal organs correspond to the 12 main acupuncture meridians (or channels) that run through the body. There is "qi" (or energy) flowing through each meridian. If an internal organ is out of balance, the qi of that organ is considered to be damaged.

Therefore, in TCM, the Kidney is said to store the body's "essence." During menopause, the "essence" of the Kidney begins to diminish. This leads to a decline in both the qi of the Kidney and the fluids which nourish and moisten the body. Symptoms of a deficiency of "essence" may include fatigue, memory problems, and thinning of bones. Many women experience joint pain and neck tension, while others begin to notice a weakness in vision or hearing.

Treatment:

As a holistic system, Chinese medicine does not separate physical symptoms from those of an emotional nature. This means that every patient with a certain symptom, in this case hot flashes, will be treated differently depending on their individual constitution. Some Chinese herbal formulas have sedating and

harmonizing properties while others work to promote the body's innate ability to heal and recuperate.

During menopause, it is believed that qi and blood are out of balance/harmony and moving in the wrong directions. Therefore, acupuncture is used to help correct the flow of qi and blood flow to the liver.

Lin's Results:

After six acupuncture sessions and herbal therapy, the afternoon fevers subsided. The dizziness and hot flashes diminished. The patient felt improvement in sleep and a decrease in night sweats. Her lower back pain was less frequent and overall she felt better. On follow-up two months later, Lin reported that two weeks after stopping acupuncture treatments, menstruation resumed with normal flow for 4 days and minimal recurrence of menopause symptoms. After that, normal menstruation occurred during the ensuing month.

Whatever discomforts a woman is experiencing during menopause, Chinese medicine offers a unique perspective and individualized treatment that takes into account all symptoms of the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. It's best to discuss with a TCM doctor about what treatments are best for you depending on your symptoms and health history.

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