

Acupuncture Treatment for 35 Cases of Urticaria

TAO Sha 陶莎

Department of Acupuncture and Moxibustion, Guanganmen Hospital, China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, Beijing 100053, China

In TCM it is held that urticaria is mostly due to weak constitution with deficiency of *qi* and blood, or prolonged illness that causes consumption of *qi* and blood. Such constitution can result in formation of wind due to blood deficiency, and internal-external lack of resistance due to *qi*-deficiency, which gives chances to pathogenic wind to invade the body, hence the occurrence of urticaria. Therefore, this disease is a complicated one with deficiency in the origin and excessiveness of pathogen. The Acupuncture and Moxibustion Department of Guanganmen Hospital has adopted acupuncture treatment for this disease through treating both the incidental and fundamental simultaneously, and obtained quite good clinical therapeutic effects as is summarized in the following.

CLINICAL DATA

35 outpatients with urticaria were treated in the Acupuncture and Moxibustion Department of Guanganmen Hospital from January 2007 to March 2008, during which 4 cases dropped the treatment. In fact, 31 cases were enrolled in the series, among whom 9 were males and 22 were females, ranging in age from 4 to 82 years, and ranging in the duration of the illness from 1 month to 30 years.

METHODS

Acupuncture was adopted. The first group of points: Dazhui (GV 14), Fengmen (BL 12), Fengshi (GB 31), Quchi (LI 11), Fengchi (GB 20); Xuehai (SP 10), Geshu (BL 17), Sanyinjiao (SP 6); Shenmen (HT 7), Shenting (GV 24), Baihui (GV 20), and Anmian (Extra). The second group of points: Huangshu (KI 16), Shuifen (CV 9), and Qihai (CV 6). The third group of points: Feishu (BL 13), Ganshu (BL 18),

Geshu (BL 17), Xinshu (BL 15), Pishu (BL 20), and Shenshu (BL 23). The points in the first group were used each time, and the points in the second and third group were used alternately. For patients with wind-heat or blood stasis, bloodletting pricking and cupping at Dazhui (GV 14) and Geshu (BL 17) could be used in combination. For patients with symptoms of the stomach and intestines, Zhongwan (CV 12) and Zusanli (ST 36) were added; and for patients with stagnation of the liver-*qi*, Qimen (LR 14) and Ligou (LR 5) were added.

The operation: Dazhui (GV 14), lateral to the spine, was punctured with a 2 *cun* filiform needle obliquely downward about 1.5 *cun*; Fengshi (GB 31) was punctured with a 2 *cun* filiform needle obliquely downward 1.5 *cun*. Fengmen (BL 12) and the Back-*shu* points were punctured with 1.5 *cun* filiform needles horizontally 0.5 *cun*. Fengchi (GB 20) and Anmian (Extra) were punctured with 1.5 *cun* filiform needles for 1 *cun* deep with the needle tip directed to the opposite eye. Shenmen (HT 7), Shenting (GV 24), and Baihui (GV 20) were punctured with 1 *cun* filiform needles perpendicularly for 0.5 *cun* deep. For the rest points, they were punctured with 1 *cun* filiform needles perpendicularly for 1 *cun* deep. Each time the needles were retained for 25 min, and the treatment was given once every other day. Uniform reinforcing-reducing method was used.

Criteria for diagnosis and therapeutic effects

The diagnostic criteria: The diagnostic criteria were made in reference to the diagnostic bases for urticaria set in *Criteria for Diagnosis and Therapeutic Effects of Diseases and Syndromes in TCM* (issued in 1994 by The State Administration of TCM) and

Dermatovenerology (the 6th edition):^{1, 2} 1) sudden occurrence, and skin damage with clear-bordered edematous patches of various sizes and shapes; 2) intermittent occurrence of skin rash in unfixed places, causing sharp itching sensation and leaving no marks after its disappearance; 3) some patients may be accompanied with abdominal pain, diarrhea, or fever and joint pain; and some severe cases can have difficulty in breathing, even asphyxia; 4) some

patients may have positive dermatograph test result.

The criteria for therapeutic effects: The evaluation were done in reference to the *2006 Diagnostic Guidance for Urticaria*, summed up by the International Symposium on Urticaria,³ which, according to the clinical symptoms and signs, gave evaluation to the urticaria patients from no to severe. (Table 1)

Table 1. Evaluation on the observation indexes of therapeutic effects

Item	no	mild	moderate	severe
Itching	no	not affecting normal life and work	affecting normal life and work to a certain degree	obviously affecting life and (or) sleep
Wheal	no	20 wheals /24h	21–50 wheals /24h	50 wheals /24h or large area fusion

The criteria for therapeutic effects

It were adopted in referring to the criteria for therapeutic effects on urticaria set in *Criteria for Diagnosis and Therapeutic Effects of Diseases and Syndromes in TCM* issued by the State Administration of TCM in 1994.¹ Cured: Wheals and clinical signs disappeared, with no recurrences. Improved: Wheals disappeared by more than 30%, or the interval between recurrences prolonged, and itching and other symptoms alleviated. Failed: Wheals and itching were not obviously relieved, or decreased by less than 30%.

RESULTS

The 31 cases of urticaria were all up to the diagnostic criteria for urticaria set in *Criteria for Diagnosis and Therapeutic Effects of Diseases and Syndromes in*

TCM, and obtained quite good therapeutic effects. Based on the above-mentioned criteria, the 31 cases all received acupuncture treatment for varying treating time from half a month to 3 months. Comparisons were made between the first visit and the last visit. The results were as follows. Cured: 8 cases (covering 25.8%); improved: 17 cases (covering 54.84%); and failed: 6 cases (covering 19.35%). The total effective rate (cured rate + improved rate) reached 81%.

The non-parametric Wilcoxon rank test was adopted for comparison between evaluation scores on the symptoms before and after treatment. Software SAS was used for statistical data. The evaluation scores after treatment were obviously lower than the scores before treatment ($P < 0.05$).

Table 2. Comparison on scores of symptoms before and after treatment ($\bar{x} \pm s$)

Item	Before treatment	After treatment
Itching	2.35±0.98	1.19±0.62
Wheals	1.91±0.86	1.03±0.57

The follow-up survey: Of the 25 effective cases, 10 got follow-up survey half a year later, among which 6 had at least one recurrence or aggravation of the symptoms. The treating courses of the 6 cases were

all shorter than one month. 4 cases didn't have recurrence, whose treating courses were all longer than 3 months. This suggests that the continuous treatment for consolidation after alleviation of the

symptoms to regulate both the congenital and the acquired foundation is effective for decreasing recurrences of urticaria.

DISCUSSION

Differential treatment based on eliminating pathogenic-wind: The main symptom of urticaria is itching. The ancient classic *The Golden Mirror of Medicine* says, "Itching falls into the category of diseases caused by pathogenic-wind, which is the main causative factor of various diseases." Pathogenic-wind can not only directly lead to disharmony between nutrient *qi* and defense *qi*, but also affect functions of the *zang-fu* organs, leading to disturbance in the formation and transportation of nutrient *qi* and defense *qi*. Therefore, pathogenic-wind is the key factor for the occurrence of urticaria. The Taiyang meridians play an important role in protecting the whole body like a fence. Fengmen (BL 12) on the Bladder Channel of Foot Taiyang and Fengshi (GB 31) are effective to disperse wind from the body surface and unblock the collaterals. Being the meeting point of the Du Channel with the three *yang* channels of the hand and foot, point Dazhui (GV 14) is able to disperse wind and clear heat. Since 'pathogenic-wind attacks first the upper part of the body', Fengchi (GB 20), the meeting point of the Shaoyang Channel of the Hand and Foot with the Yangwei Channel, can yield the effects of activating the defensive *yang*, and dispersing wind to stop itching. The Yangming Channel is a channel full of *qi* and blood. The *He* (Sea) point of this channel Quchi (LI 11) is a place for transporting *qi* and blood, and thus, can distribute *qi* and blood, and eliminate pathogenic-wind on the superficial and the other part of the body.

Differential treatment based on nourishing blood: Pathogenic-wind is the superficiality of urticaria, which is mostly due to deficiency of nutrient-blood bringing about endogenous wind. Therefore, neither simple tonification method can be used here to treat the blood-deficiency, nor the simple wind-dispelling method can be used for dispelling the pathogenic-wind. An ancient saying goes that 'To treat wind,

blood should be treated first; and where there is free flow of blood, there is no wind'. So, while dispelling wind, the method of nourishing blood should be adopted in combination. The use of Xuehai (SP 10) of the Spleen Channel of Foot-Taiyin, Geshu (BL 17), the confluent point of blood, and Sanyinjiao (SP 6), the meeting point of the three *yin* channels of the foot can nourish blood, moisten dryness, and check itching. For patients with severe symptoms of wind-heat, bloodletting pricking and cupping can be applied on Dazhui (GV 14) and Geshu (BL 17) to make the substantial blood bring the non-substantial pathogenic-heat out, so as to enhance the effects of dispersing wind, reducing heat, and removing blood stasis to promote blood regeneration. The above-mentioned Quchi (LI 11) and Fengmen (BL 12) can be used in combination for promoting circulation of *qi* and blood, and dispelling wind and dredging the channels, so as to activate the flow of *qi* of the *zang-fu* organs, channels and collaterals to relieve itching.

Differential treatment based on mind-tranquilization: It is said in the 74th chapter of *Suwen* (素问 Plain Questions) that 'pain, itching and sores are all related with the heart'. Urticaria patients will have the mind affected due to the unbearable itching. They may have restlessness of mind and irritability, which, in prolonged cases, will affect the sleep and mental state. Declined mentality can further lead to aggravation of urticaria. Therefore, the principle of treatment aims at stopping itching and pain, regulating the mind to dredge the channels and collaterals, which is the so-called 'turning the mind away from the pain', so as to alleviate the patient's mental sufferings from itching and pain, break down the vicious cycle, and relieve the symptoms and signs. The use of Shenmen (HT 7), the *yuan* (source) point of the Heart Channel of Hand-Shaoyin, can obtain the effects of nourishing the heart, tranquilizing the mind, and stopping itching. Anmian (Extra) is an effective empirical point in tranquilizing the mind and helping sleep. Shenting (GV 24) and Baihui (GV 20) on the Du Channel can not only regulate *qi* of the Du Channel, but also calm the mind and smooth the brain.

Regulating both the congenital and the acquired: Urticaria usually has a long duration, with repeated attacks and outward manifestations of deficiency of the vital-*qi*, and disharmony between the *zang-fu* organs. "To treat the exterior syndrome, the internal related organs should also be treated." In the acupuncture treatment of urticaria, the four points around the umbilicus and Back-*shu* points are always alternately used in combination, so as to regulate both the congenital and the acquired, reinforce the vital-*qi*, and prevent the pathogens from invading in. This method of treatment is based on the saying that 'when the internal vital-*qi* is strong, it is difficult for the pathogens to invade the body', which treats the whole body by means of dredging the channels and collaterals, harmonizing *qi* and blood, and balancing the *zang-fu* organs, so as to strengthen the source for manufacturing sufficient *qi* and blood. In so doing, the pathological mechanism can be changed, the

vicious cycle chain in the complicated pathological changes can be controlled, the internal vital-*qi* can be activated, the internal environment of the human body can be changed, and the normal physiological functions can be restored, hence the fundamental change of the condition and the marked therapeutic effects.

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