

TREATING BACK PAIN WITH SHIATSU

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Shiatsu is a holistic therapy. As such, it views the body as a whole. When treating pain, we believe it is more effective to try to find balance in the whole body than to follow the pain. If we achieve a more balanced body, pain diminishes or disappears.

In this particular case, the imbalance has produced back pain. As we shall see later, the back and neck are connected, and pain in either of them usually affects movement in the other.

The back is usually associated with the water element, and the neck with fire. We need to find balance within each element, and between both elements.

ASSESSING BACK PAIN

Assessing back pain should be the first step. We can observe how bad the pain is at the beginning, and how much it has improved at the end of the treatment. It also allows us to show the patient how much improvement there has been in one session.

To assess the pain we ask the patient to make the movements **slowly** and stop as soon as he/she feels any pain or discomfort **anywhere** in the body.

The patient should be standing. The movements we should check are flexion of the spine (forward bend), lateral flexion of spine (side bend) and axial rotation of spine (side twisting).

We may also check the same neck movements, since back pain may cause reduced neck movement and vice versa.

TYPES OF BACK PAIN ACCORDING TO TCM

Qi Stagnation

Qi stagnation is defined by the type of pain. It is usually a dull ache that radiates pain from the point or area where the point is located. Qi may become stagnated for a number of reasons. The most common one nowadays, is a sedentary lifestyle and/or lack of exercise.



フ However, Qi stagnation that produces back pain may also be due to painful periods in the case of women, and to the invasion of cold, dampness, or both. Cold and dampness cause the Qi to slow down, and, according to TCM, is one of the main causes of arthritis.

If left untreated, Qi stagnation can lead to blood stagnation.

指 Blood Stagnation (blood stasis)

庄 Blood stagnation is usually defined by sharp pains or other blood circulation problems. Heavy lifting, a sport's injury, an accident, or any other kind of trauma to the back may cause blood stagnation in that area. The trauma may cause inflammation and bruising. We should never apply shiatsu on areas of inflammation.

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校 Blood stagnation may also be caused by a history of Qi stagnation. Qi moves the blood, so if it remains stagnant for long enough, then the local body fluids begin to stagnate as well.

The third possible cause of blood stagnation is emotional stress. Frustration can give rise to the Qi stagnation type of back pain, but if it goes on for long enough, it becomes more tight and compacted.

Damp Heat

This condition causes radiating pain that spreads from the lower back into the groin area and lower abdomen. It is generally associated with urogenital disorders such as infections in the urinary tract. Although we may be able to alleviate the pain, the patient should consult a doctor.

Liver Qi stagnation

As the Liver organ in TCM is closely associated with emotions such as stress, frustration and anger – we would often observe case histories where back pain is triggered or exacerbated by emotional triggers such as premenstrual syndrome.

Liver qi stagnation may be accompanied by tenderness around the ribs, pain on the sides, hard-to-swallow lump in the throat and frequent sighing

Kidney Yin Deficiency.

Backache due to yin deficiency is usually a long-term problem with no history of trauma. It may be accompanied by other yin deficiency symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, tinnitus, irritability and restlessness.

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プロ Kidney Yang Deficiency

Backache due to yang deficiency may be accompanied by other yang deficiency symptoms such as early morning diarrhea, cold hands and feet, lack of energy, pale face, hearing loss, feeling cold all the time, frequent urination, low libido.

Kidney yin or yang deficiency takes much longer to treat than qi or blood stagnation.

PATIENT POSITIONING FOR TREATING BACK PAIN WITH SHIATSU

Many muscles involved in back movements are connected to the neck and head: iliocostalis cervicis, iliocostalis thoracis, longissimus capitis, longissimus cervicis, spinalis thoracis and multifidus.

For this reason, we believe it is not the best idea to have someone lying down with the head to one side when they suffer from back pain.

If the patient stays for long in this position, the back pain may become worse.

For this treatment, we should work on the patient on his/her back and on his/her side, but not face down.

We can improve the patient's position with a cushion, preferably a bolster cushion. A cushion under the back of the knees, when the patient is on their back, decreases stress on the spine and supports the natural curve in the lower back. The cushion will also relax the iliopsoas muscle. Tension or strain on the iliopsoas muscle is one of the possible causes of back pain. In this case, the pain may extend to the front thigh.

When the patient is lying on his/her side for the treatment, place a cushion under the top leg. This position is better than placing a cushion between the knees. Putting a pillow or cushion between the knees puts pressure on the bottom leg, and doesn't correctly align the spine, because the natural curvature of the lower back is increased.



SHIATSU TREATMENT FOR BACK PAIN

At The Professional Shiatsu School, we believe in the principle of minimum pain when treating patients. This is the reason why we avoid touching the painful area, until the end.

1. Upper back. Small Intestine 9 to 15. Bl 11 to 17 and 41 to 46. San Jiao 15

2. Middle back. Bladder 18 to 20/22 and 47 to 49/51.

3. Sacrum. Bladder 31 to 34. Bladder 27 to 30

4. Gluteus. From Bladder 53 to the gluteal fold.

5. Femoral posterior region (back of thigh). Work on the whole area of the hamstring muscles: biceps femoris, semimebranosus and semitendinosus.

6. Sustained pressure on Bl 60.

7. Hip rotations. Ask patient to choose the side (i.e. clockwise or anticlockwise) and the leg that rotate best. Begin with that leg, and rotate only to the best side. Do a minimum of 40 rotations. Go to the other leg and rotate it to the best side.

8. San Jiao on the arm. Between little and ring fingers (several times).

9. Sustained pressure on SI 3

10. The stomach meridian is the most useful to balance fire and water. Work on the stomach meridian on the thigh.

Special point: 1.5 to 2 cuns from Stomach 31 in a caudal direction.

11. Press around the navel. Eight-point circle. (St 24 to 26 and Governing Vessel 5 and 10). Optional (GV 6)

12. Neck. Bladder meridian. Small intestine/San Jiao behind sternocleidomastoid. Large intestine/small intestine, on the sternocleidomastoid.

13. Finish with a sustained pressure on Bl 10 on both sides.

