

## **Acupuncture and the treatment of Headaches**

By: Nir Saar R.Ac (Registered Acupuncturist with the CTCMPAO)

[www.zen-needle.ca](http://www.zen-needle.ca)

According to the National Headaches foundations website there are many type of headaches, the list is quite daunting. Some of these Headaches might be a red flag for a more serious condition, most often headaches are common in the general population and are not indicative of a serious health condition. <sup>1,2</sup>



In case the headaches are of a chronic nature, there is probably an underlying cause that should be addressed. Usually when a patient comes for acupuncture to treat their headaches, they have already seen their medical doctor and tried different medications with mixed results.

The underlying conditions that acupuncture can help with that might cause headaches are as follows:

- Stress related
- Structural related (cervical spine – neck, jaw, back of neck)
- Hormonal related (Women – in some correlation to menstrual cycle)
- High blood pressure related.
- Sinus related.
- As one of cold symptoms.
- Hypoglycemic related.
- Circulation issues (Vertebral artery – or other)
- Allergies.
- After a fall on the head or secondary to whiplash (for example after a car accident).

When using acupuncture to resolve chronic headaches we will use the Traditional Chinese (TCM) diagnostic approach (questions, pulse taking and structural assessment ).

The treatment will include treating the constitutional aspect of the body of the person (balancing the Qi / life force of the internal organs ) and also the treating the area of symptoms according to which meridian (energy channel ) is affecting that area.

---

1 <http://www.headaches.org/2008/12/11/the-complete-headache-chart/>

2 <http://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/guide/migraines-headaches-basics#1>

### **For example a TCM approach to treat hormonal related headaches:**

These headaches occurs regularly for our female patient, 35 years of age and these headaches usually correlate with the time that her menstrual cycle is ending. The pulse will be taken to see what is the underlying condition (in order to have a better understanding of the condition of her internal organs from an energy (Blood flow, Qi ) perspective.

Also her abdomen will be palpated to see if there is any rigidity in the lower abdomen, Uterus – Ovaries area (that will be later resolved with distal needling – on the arms or legs), questions will be asked in regards to her menstrual cycle – to see the patterns that might be affecting her cycle.

The acupuncture points to treat the condition will have the effect of 'Moving' and 'Strengthening' her 'Blood' (which is a TCM concept), some acupuncture points will target the neck as well (to relax the muscles and potentially help reduce the symptoms), some points will target the Liver organ's energy in order to relax the nervous system and some points will help 'regulate' hormones.

### **Another example of a treatment approach for a client that is suffering from a Headache which is caused by sinus congestion and allergies:**

We will be looking at nutrition and lifestyle changes just to make sure that there are no types of food that are aggravating and overloading the allergies and congestion, also we will be looking at stress as an aggravating factor and the Lungs and Large intestines (Chinese) organs as the organs that can support the immune system function.

Acupuncture points will be used to target the sinuses areas using different meridians that reach or affect the areas of sinus (maxillary and frontal) - Will also be looking at acupuncture points that have the ability to potentially enhance the function of the immune system and points that can help reduce stress and release the neck (Headaches many times have a neck tightness component to them).

### **Opening the stuckness is good thing!**

According the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), there is a bodily cycle of blood and Qi (life force) that goes through all the major organs, most people have areas in their bodies that are not functioning in an optimal way in relation to this cycle and flow. This reduced functionality can be caused by life style habits, aging, stress and physical trauma and will make the person susceptible to certain ailments.

The person's 'constitution' – or genetic predisposition, will influence what kind of imbalanced we will have a tendency to have during our life time, TCM can identify constitutional types and address those tendencies accordingly.

When we treat any symptom according to TCM, we would like to 'open' or clear any areas in the body that are not 'flowing' properly and work with the constitutional tendencies. Working in this way we can create a more lasting affect in relation to the symptoms.

### **Research in regards to the efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of Migraine-headaches**

“lasting effects were seen only in study participants who received traditional acupuncture. Three months after treatment, people who received traditional Chinese acupuncture continued to report a reduction in migraine days, frequency, and intensity. People who received the sham treatment did not.”<sup>3</sup>

(See footnotes for more details for this specific research.)

---

3 <http://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/news/20120112/acupuncture-may-be-effective-for-migraines#1>