

Acupuncture in the Treatment of Anxiety Neurosis By Frank Gemmato, LAc

Acupuncture's effectiveness in the treatment of anxiety neurosis from a variety of causes is well documented. Anxiety as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), drug detox, or psychological problems are amenable to acupuncture treatment. A study in the American Journal of Chinese Medicine (7: 3, 1979 Autumn, p. 253-8) showed a 75 per cent success rate in the treatment of anxiety neurosis. The results were attributed to the release of endorphins.

Anxiety disorders may be broken down into two categories. The first is an acute phase which encompasses symptoms of anxiety or panic "attack". Symptoms may include tachycardia, palpitations, cold sweats, tremors, dizziness, overall motor weakness, "butterflies in the stomach", nausea and sometimes diarrhea. The anxiety attack may progress to hyperventilation, with numbness and tingling of the extremities, a feeling of disconnection with people, and sometimes a fear of losing consciousness or dying may result.

Symptoms of chronic anxiety are usually similar, but less severe than those above. A sense apprehension or dread, a tendency to startle easily, an uneasiness in the normal situations of life such as work or shopping, and vague and persistent fear of the future are the usual symptoms. Additionally, the patient may experience the following somatic symptoms: fatigue, insomnia, headaches, and dysfunction in personal relationships and daily activities.

Utilizing the techniques of traditional Chinese medicine, a person's unique symptomatology may be understood in terms of what is causing the problem and treated accordingly, utilizing a series of acupuncture treatments and/or herbal supplementation.

Currently, acupuncture is used world-wide in the treatment of anxiety neurosis in the process of drug detoxification. The benefits of acupuncture in helping people abstain from recreational drugs are well known. Many government programs fund acupuncture treatment for detoxification, and acupuncture is regarded as a unique, efficacious, drugless therapy. Statistically it is seen as the most effective therapy for drug detoxification, having a very low recidivism rate.

In my own clinical practice, I have treated patients suffering from anxiety as a result of trauma (post traumatic stress disorder). Whether these patients are recovering from the terror of a serious accident, or whether they were personally assaulted, or whether they are survivors of war, I have employed acupuncture successfully in the management of anxiety neurosis. The five-needle ear protocol in the management of anxiety is effective in reducing symptoms. Body points tailored to the specific type of anxiety (e.g. whether the patient is agitated or depressed) enable a precise treatment of a particular patient.

I have personally treated patients with severe PTSD as a result of exposure to the ravages of the Viet Nam War. The acupuncture enabled a deep experience of serenity during the treatment, that would last for a period of hours or days. The subjective experience of these patients was that acupuncture had helped them to attain a level of serenity not experienced in decades.

Success depends on the severity of the trauma endured and the inherent mental and emotional stability of the patient. In mild to moderate cases, acupuncture and herbal intervention may be used to facilitate an apparent cure of the anxiety-related symptoms. In severe cases, acupuncture can be used to aid in controlling anxiety. Patients can sometimes require maintenance treatment on a monthly basis, or more often as the symptoms warrant.