How Do You Treat Adult Obesity in Your Practice?

Obesity is defined in Western medical usage as “an increase in adipose or fatty tissue in the body to the extent that it affects health.” This seems somewhat after the fact and says very little about what causes it in the first place.

Refining that in Traditional Chinese Medicine terms, one might say that “obesity is an imbalance in Qi energetics in the Five Elements resulting in a derangement of fat metabolism.” Which opens the way to surmise that element Earth must be involved somewhere because it rules fat and carries the color yellow. The mystery resolves itself, somewhat tamely, that if one is looking for an element that will play Aggressor on Earth, it must be Wood.

Our etiology is at hand, then, that obesity is caused by Wood aggressing on Earth, which basically means a Liver Qi stagnated, which has caused a dysfunction in Earth element, and that is a good diagnosis, as it also gives us with the treatment, “reinforce Wood and Harmonize Earth.”

To reinforce Wood, one uses LR 3 in the left foot with an even movement. Place the patient supine, with the left leg flexed at the knee and the left foot on the flat surface in natural position. Massage the point with medium pressure until the patient reports some soreness, warmth, tingling, numbness. Insert a 36-gauge, 1.5-inch needle perpendicularly to a depth of 0.5. Let the needle sit there until it gathers Qi, i.e., the sensations of soreness, etc., become intensified.

To harmonize Earth, one needles ST 36 on the right side. Insert a similar type needle into it perpendicularly. Wait until Qi arrives, then turn the needle in, reinforcing the mode for 20 turns, and when the needle feels “stuck” or heavy, turn rapidly 40 times by a reducing action.

Add topical points like Ren 12. If you are familiar with Japanese type thread moxa, burn 5 on each point after the needles are withdrawn. One treatment a week for 4 weeks makes 1 session. With 1 week’s rest, repeat for 5 sessions and assess. This approach carries a good prognosis with a gradual weight loss that does not relapse.

REFERENCE


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Laser acupuncture has the advantages of effectiveness, as effective as needle acupuncture: painless, 0.25 J/cm²; convenience, handy device; time saving, 3-5 minutes in single therapy; and safety, non-invasive in simple obesity therapy. Patients with simple obesity are included whose BMI was greater than 27. In Taiwan, overweight and obesity are defined as BMI ≥24 and ≥27 kg, respectively. These cut-offs differ from Western standards as Asians have higher comorbidities and fat mass at lower BMI levels than whites. We treated them with gallium-arsenic handylaser (50 mW in maximal power, 785 nm in wave length, pulsed wave, Bahr frequency, RJ-Laser, Reimers and Janssen, GmbH, Germany), and 2 to 4 kg of body weight was reduced in 1 month (3 times a week for 4 weeks).

Stomach, Hunger (auricular points), ST 25 (Tianshu), ST 28 (Shuidao), ST 40 (Fenglong), SP 15 (Daheng), and CV 9 (Shuifen) were prescribed for weight loss. Daily intake energy was recommended for obese females as the following formula (height in cm / 100 x 0.6 x 30 kcal; and height in cm – 80) x 0.7 x 30 kcal for obese males on regular diet. It is between not active (28.66 kcal/kg) and moderately active (33.07 kcal/kg) persons, required to maintain their body weight. Most patients experienced lessened ap-
In my approach to treating obesity using acupuncture, I consider: (1) the removal of Phlegm, (2) balancing and harmonizing metabolism, (3) treating addictive behaviors, (4) removing excess fluids (fluid retention), (5) encouraging/instructing the patient in proper dietetics/nutrition and regular exercise, and (6) applying auricular acupuncture. For the removal of Phlegm, the following points are indicated: ST 40x2 for generalized Phlegm accumulation, and ST 8x2 for removal of localized Phlegm. To balance and harmonize metabolism, the following acupuncture points are indicated: TE 5x2, BL 22x2, BL 39x2, CV 22, CV 23. To treat addictive behaviors, the following points are indicated: PC 6x2, WEI-WEI (Figure 1) x2. To remove excess fluids, the following points may be used: LU 9x2, BL 13x2, SP 9x2, BL 20x2, KI 10x2, BL 23x2. For the treatment of adult obesity, the following auricular microsystem acupuncture points are indicated: Shenmen, mouth points, thyroid points, antihunger points, antiaddiction points (Figure 2), and others.

In my clinical practice, I usually use classical acupuncture points initially and then auricular acupuncture for patient self-manipulation (maintenance). I typically follow up once a week for 4 weeks to gauge the response and if it is positive, I will then go to biweekly treatments for 4 months. If the patient is then having a positive response, again I will go to a once-a-month treatment for maintenance purposes. The key to treating obesity is effectively using motivation, diet, exercise, and acupuncture.

Chinese medicine attributes overweight to Phlegm and Damp, secondary to Spleen deficiency, Qi and Blood stagnation, and sometimes, Kidney deficiency. A logical approach involves points to circulate energy such as LV 3, LI 4, tonify the Spleen/Stomach (SP 3,5, ST 36, BL 20, 21, and CV 12), resolve Phlegm (ST 40), and tonify the Kidney (KI 3, BL 23). For herbs, Spleen/Stomach tonics like Liu Jun Zi Tang (Six Gentleman Pills, Prosperous Farmer),1 and Bao He Wan (Quiet digestion)2 are always
useful, while specific weight loss formulas like Wu Long Pian (Black Dragon)\(^3\) can be used in specific circumstances. This approach should be grounded in a comprehensive program that includes nutritional counseling, a daily exercise program, and stress reduction.

**REFERENCES**


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Obesity is usually caused by consuming more calories than the body expends in energy. Diet control is an important approach in preventing and treating obesity. Besides choosing food that contains lower calories, the amount of food intake is critical. Ear acupoint magnet therapy is a simple method that may control appetite and food cravings.\(^1\)

A 54-year-old woman presented weighing 255 lbs and wishing to reduce her body weight. At the beginning, she chose an 1800-calorie diet and then reduced it to 1500 calories a day. She lost 34 lbs within 6 months. After this, she lowered her caloric intake to 1200 calories a day. But, she reported that her appetite was a problem all the time and she thought about food all day long. She started eating more and lost her previous control. Her weight loss was at a standstill and she had a tendency to again gain weight. In order to control this undesired appetite, the patient asked for help utilizing acupuncture. A magnet disk with 2500 gauze was applied on each ear on the Thalamus point (refers to Hypothalamus in Chinese auricular acupuncture)\(^2\) with adhesive tape (Figure). The magnets remained on her ear 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Her appetite was controlled immediately. She was able to consume only 1200 calories a day easily and lost another 12 lbs within 4 weeks.

In Western medicine, the hypothalamus is important for ingestion. It is the “hunger center” and “satiety center.” Research has shown that lesion of the area in the lateral hypothalamus, in which electrical stimulation can induce eating behavior, causes refusal of food; whereas lesion of the area in certain ventromedial region of the hypothalamus, in which electrical stimulation inhibits eating behavior, elicits excessive eating and obesity.\(^3\)

Hypothalamic neurotransmitters and neuropeptides are involved in the energy balance. For instance, microinjection of noradrenalin into the hypothalamus dramatically increases food intake; direct injection of serotonin into the hypothalamus suppresses food intake; and, drugs that release

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**CLINICAL PEARLS**

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**FIG.** Acupuncture point on ear for adjusting appetite
serotonin from nerve endings decrease food intake and body weight. The higher centers of the brain are also involved in eating and drinking.\(^3\) The point of Hypothalamus is the first choice in reducing appetite and limiting food intake. If a person loses his/her appetite, stimulating the Hypothalamus point can increase appetite. Using the Thalamus point is also cosmetically convenient.

Magnetic energy working on acupoints may be more useful than using acupuncture needles or herbal seeds.\(^5\) It is not aggressive and is easily accepted. As long as adequate information is provided to the users, it can become self-care therapy and may reduce the cost of medical care.

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**ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT FOR SIMPLE OBESITY IS STILL BEING STUDIED.** A summary of research in acupuncture treatment for simple obesity may give us an overview in this area. Firstly, various methods have been used in clinical observations. This includes classical body acupuncture, electroacupuncture, Auricular Plaster Therapy, magnetic acupuncture, ear acupuncture, and Chinese herbal medicine; secondly, the dominant studies were clinical trials and observations; thirdly, the indications or standards that applied in these studies were body weight (BW), body mass index (BMI); the changes in waistline (WL) and hip circumference (HC); their ratio (WL/HC or WHR), cholesterol (TC) in indexes of blood lipid;\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^4\) finally, a majority of these studies were published in journals which are based on Chinese and Japanese publishers. More noticeably, participants were of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean ethnicity.\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\)\(^4\) In summary, a typical Chinese diet, consisting of vegetables plus a small amount of rice with some lean pork, chicken, and fish or soy products as the main protein source is more difficult to be controlled in both treatment groups and controls in these studies. Such diets may play an important role in outcomes in addition to acupuncture treatments. In comparison, the clinical trials of Chinese herbal medicine had much more convincing data in physiology and pharmacology.\(^5\)\(^6\)

In my practice, I tend to use a combination of Chinese herbs and acupuncture. Dietary advice as well as exercise (e.g., walking) constitute a holistic program. Selections of female patients under 40 years of age with simple obesity were treated. The major acupoints selected were as follows: PC 6 (Neiguan), ST 40 (Fenglong), ST 21 (Liangmen), GB 26 (Daimai), SP 6 (Sanyinjiao), CV 12 (Zhongwan). The main herbs used were: Alisma Orientalis (Ze Xie), 18 g; Nelumbo Nucifera Gaertn. (He Ye); 12 g were all given as daily dosages in decoction formulas.

From my experience, better outcomes come from those with a commitment towards achieving health outcomes or goals. These groups of people had actively involved themselves in the treatment programs. Here, I raise some unsolved points about these weight control programs: Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture programs are likely to achieve short-term goals. However, to determine whether it may be used as a long-term program requires further research in addition to education of program participants about diet and exercise.

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I do a combination of 5 things after I make my diagnosis:

1. I decide on a treatment plan for his/her condition according to signs and symptoms.
2. I use the “Turtle” acupuncture technique, plus SP 9 and ST 40, to address obesity. (“Turtle” is an area around the naval that looks like a turtle. It is used as a mirror for the body. The head is at Ren 12.)
3. I conduct nutritional counseling and request completion of food charts.
4. I educate my patients on the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concepts of obesity.
5. I provide a brochure on “Food Therapy” for Dampness.

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In treating obesity, I: 1) Embed catgut in acupoints CV 4, CV 6, ST 25, ST 28, ST 36, and “fat” points by using lumbar puncture needle. (The special needles are in small sizes. The “fat” points are the places where there is too much fat, but attention should be paid to avoid the nerves and blood vessels.) Sterilize the points first, then apply local anesthesia. Put the catgut (2-4 cm in length) in the lumbar puncture needle and embed it in the fat layer. The points should be protected from infection by wound bandage. Catgut can only be embedded in the fat layer and not muscle. 2) Use direct moxibustion, the method of putting moxicones directly on the skin and letting it burn naturally until a patient cannot tolerate the pain. Use acupoints CV 4 and ST 36. Apply at least 3 moxi-cones on 1 acupoint every time; each cone is 1 cm in height, 1 cm in diameter. Caution: if the skin is burned, protect it from infection. It is a long-term treatment so persist as long as possible.

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