

**Community Acupuncture**

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Acupuncture and Digestive Health

Over 95 million Americans suffer from digestive disorders ranging from constipation, diarrhea and irritable bowel syndrome to more serious conditions such as acid reflux (GERD), ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease.

In fact, over 35 million physician office visits a year are due to gastro-intestinal complaints. With the side-effects that often accompany western medicine and sometimes less-than-desirable results, many patients are turning to acupuncture for help. Reports are confirming that acupuncture and Chinese medicine can offer relief from even the most complex digestive problems.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Digestive Disorders

Evidence that Chinese medicine has been used for digestive disorders can be found in early medical literature dating back to 3 AD, where specific acupuncture points and herbal formulas for borborygmus (rumbling or gurgling in the intestines), abdominal pain and diarrhea with pain are discussed.

According to Chinese medical theory, most digestive disorders are due to disharmony in the spleen and stomach. The spleen plays a central part in the health and vitality of the body, taking a lead role in the assimilation of nutrients and maintenance of physical strength. It turns digested food from the stomach into usable nutrients and qi. Many schools of thought have been formed around this organ; the premise being that the proper functioning of the 'middle' is the key to all aspects of vitality.

By taking into account a persons' constitution and varied symptoms, a treatment plan is designed specifically for the individual to bring their "middle" back into harmony and optimize the proper functioning of the digestive system. A variety of techniques can be used during treatment including acupuncture, herbal medicine, bodywork, lifestyle/dietary recommendations and energetic exercises to restore digestive health.

If you suffer from a digestive disorder, give us a call. We will be able to give you more information about treatment options to get you healthy and symptom free!

**In This Issue**

Acupuncture and Digestive Health

Zusanli, "Three Miles of the Foot"

Study: Acupuncture for Acid Reflux Disease

IBS Awareness Month

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IBS is a common disorder affecting 10 to 20 percent of adults at some point in their lives. Once called "spastic colon," it's a combination of symptoms that may include constipation, diarrhea, gas, bloating, fatigue and headaches that can be worsened by certain foods, stress and other irritants. IBS is the end result of nervous interference with the normal function of the lower digestive tract. The symptoms are variable and change over time.

IBS according to Chinese Medicine

While other patterns may be present, IBS is almost always considered a disharmony between the liver and the spleen in Chinese medicine. The liver is responsible for the smooth flow of qi and blood throughout the body. This flow can be upset by emotions or

Zusanli, "Three Miles of the Foot"

The acupuncture point, *Zusanli*, also known as **Stomach 36 (St 36)**, is one of the most frequently used of all acupuncture points and is certainly the most intensively studied. The indications for use of this acupuncture point are many, and the claimed benefits are substantial.

Zusanli is a very powerful point for digestive health. This acupuncture point adjusts the qi and blood throughout the body and strengthens the spleen and stomach. It is one of the major supplementation points on the body and has the ability to treat a wide range of conditions.

Current research has found the *Zusanli* can both increase and decrease movement in the stomach, raise and lower blood pressure and increase or decrease the white blood cell count depending upon whether there are too few or too many white blood cells. Because of its ability to balance and regulate, it is generally considered to be a point that has a beneficial effect on the whole body.

Massaging *Zusanli* is often an important exercise in Qi Gong and martial arts practices. Regular application of moxibustion (a therapy which involves the burning of specific herbs at acupuncture points) to *Zusanli* is considered to be a method for gaining longevity. There is an ancient Chinese saying: "*Moxa Zusanli and live to be a hundred.*"

The English translation of *Zusanli* is "*three miles of the foot*". The name comes from the assertion that, even when totally exhausted, needling *Zusanli* would allow one to walk a further three miles.

Stomach 36 is located four finger breadths below the kneecap, one finger breadth outside of the shinbone, in the groove. The point is usually tender.



stress, causing stagnation of qi (energy) or blood. Chinese medicine views the spleen as being associated with the function of digestion and transforming food into energy (qi and blood). The spleen can be weakened by a number of factors including overeating unhealthy foods, overwork, too much worry, fatigue, and lack of exercise. When the spleen is weak and the liver is not moving smoothly, the liver overacts on the spleen and can manifest as symptoms of IBS.

Recommended Lifestyle Changes

- **Get Acupuncture** - An increasing number of studies show that acupuncture can offer relief from digestive disorders.
- **Relieve Stress** - Try Qi Gong, Tai Chi, meditation, yoga or breathing exercises. Finding a way to relax is key to keeping IBS symptoms under control.
- **Exercise** - Physical activity helps to maintain bowel regularity and reduce stress.

Nutrition and Supplements

- **Identify trigger foods** - By keeping a symptom diary, you should be able to pinpoint the foods that lead to your IBS symptoms. For example, some foods that may increase gas and bloating are beans and raw fruits and vegetables.
- **Avoid dairy foods** - Eliminating milk and milk products can be a big help for many people.
- **Don't overeat** - Too much food in a single meal can set off IBS symptoms; opt for small, frequent meals when possible.
- **Take probiotics with meals** - These products contain "friendly" bacteria that can stabilize the digestive tract; you can find milk-free brands (such as Culturelle) in health-food stores.
- **Take peppermint oil** - Enteric-coated capsules taken 15 to 30 minutes before meals led to significant improvement in IBS symptoms among participants in a Chinese study. Take one or two capsules three times a day before meals.

Study: Acupuncture for Acid Reflux Disease

A study published in the *American Journal of Physiology - Gastrointestinal and Liver* indicates that stimulation of certain acupuncture points inhibits esophageal sphincter relaxations by as much as 40%.

Although the cause of *gastro-esophageal reflux disease*, or GERD, is still unknown, there are treatments available on the market to help with the symptoms. However, many of the existing treatments come with side effects and their effectiveness can be limited.

The *American Physiological Society* opened eyes by pointing to the effectiveness of electrical acupuncture point stimulation in reducing the key mechanism of GERD, transient lower esophageal sphincter relaxations (TLESRs). This important muscle allows food to pass into the stomach when working normally. In people who have GERD, the muscle relaxes at the wrong times, allowing stomach acid to churn up into the esophagus and resulting in heartburn symptoms.

By applying only mild stimulation to an acupuncture point on the wrist known as Neiguan (Pericardium 6), researchers were able to reduce the frequency of TLESRs from six to 3.5 an hour in research subjects. Sham stimulation of a hip point produced no comparable change.

Source: *American Journal of Physiology—Gastrointestinal and Liver Physiology*, 2005