



CASE REPORT - ACUPUNCTURE TREATMENT IN CLUSTER HEADACHE

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ABSTRACT

Cluster headache is a primary headache disorder that belongs to the trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias, affecting up to 0.1% of the population. Cluster headache has been historically considered to have a male dominance, with a high male-to-female ratio. Cluster periods or known as bouts of frequent attacks, can last from a few weeks to a few months followed by remission periods when the headaches stop. During the day the headache lasts from 15 to 180 minutes and can be repeated up to 8 times. For thousands of years, acupuncture and TCM have been used to relieve headaches and migraines, as well as their underlying causes. The aim of the treatment with acupuncture is providing pain relief by stimulating nerves, reducing inflammation, affecting serotonin level in the brain, balancing extra-cranial and intracranial blood flow. In this article is presented a case of 36 years old man with chronic headache that has been present for about 15 years. The patient has made 30 acupuncture treatments in a period of one and a half year. Before starting the treatments, the patient tried different medicines like analgesics and decongestants because his nose has been blocked very often. During the treatment he started to feel better and he started reducing the tablets little by little with consultation with doctor. Acupuncture is the primary form of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and a number of clinical researches have indicated that acupuncture is a safe and effective treatment to prevent and treat cluster headache.

KEYWORDS: Cluster, headache, acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine.

INTRODUCTION

Cluster headache is a primary headache disorder that belongs to the trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias, affecting up to 0.1% of the population. Cluster headache has been historically considered to have a male dominance, with a high male-to-female ratio. This kind of headaches are characteristically excruciating, unilateral, and commonly involves the first division of the trigeminal nerve. The pain can be perceived to have appeared from the sinuses or from the dentition, that's why patients very often visit a dentist or otolaryngologist for this reason. The quality of the pain is strong, intense, sharp, and burning and it is also known as "suicide headaches.

Cluster headache attacks may last from 15 to 180 min, with an average of 45–90 min in duration. During an attack, patients experience cranial autonomic symptoms, which include lacrimation, eye redness, eye discomfort such as grittiness, nasal congestion, aural fullness, throat swelling, and flushing. Patients may have attacks up to 8 times a day. Attacks usually occur at night and patients report a sleep association. Attacks appear at the same time in the day and their pattern is circadian.

The duration, in which patients have attacks of cluster headache, is called a bout. There are two types of cluster headache: Episodic and chronic cluster headache, defined by the remission duration between bouts. Patients with chronic cluster headache have persistent attacks occurring for more than one year without remission, or a remission period lasting less than three months. Patients with episodic cluster headache may notice a pattern to their bouts, typically occurring around spring and autumn.^[1]

Any age is possible for onset, but according to researches the typical age is approximately 30 years. Men are three times more likely to suffer from cluster headache than women, but also current research has shown that the ratio has decreased over time. Patients have noticed that their attacks may be triggered by various substances like alcohol, nitrate-containing foods, strong smell, hot weather, sexual activity, stress, glare. Patients with a history of head trauma have a predisposition to catch cluster headache.

The diagnosis is clinical. Doctors must have a degree of suspicion, because cluster headaches are usually

misdiagnosed, and patients do not receive a clinical diagnosis for up to five years. Patients should have, computed tomography (CT) or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the head as an alternative, to rule out any structural abnormality.

There are two types of treatments of cluster headache: treatment of acute attack and preventative treatment. The most well-known cure treatment for cluster headaches is 100% oxygen therapy. At least 66% of patients respond to oxygen therapy in less than 10 minutes. The only recommended treatment for the prevention of cluster headaches is a suboccipital blockade.^[2]

For a long time, acupuncture has been widely used as an essential and safest alternative or complementary treatment method against various diseases worldwide. As is well-known, acupuncture can reduce the dosage of drugs and side effects. Acupuncture is the primary form of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) that uses needles to puncture into acupoints on the skin.^[3] Acupoints are mechanically stimulated, triggering nerve signaling that affects the function of other parts of the body, including organs. Acupuncture raises the level of certain hormones, gamma globulin, antibodies, ie has immuno-stimulating effect, stimulates the production of endorphins, influence on the production and secretion of several neurotransmitters and helps for better circulation.^[4,5]

CASE REPORT

The treated patient is a 36 year old male, with cluster headache on his right side of the head, face, neck, tearing of the eye and stuffy nose present over 15 years. The patient has made 30 acupuncture treatments. The first 10 therapies were done in a period of 3 months, and afterwards the patient had a break of 5 months without acupuncture and continued and did the other 20 therapies. Because of the strong and frequent pain the patient was unable to sleep, was stressed and anxious all the time. He tried to treat his problem with different medicines like analgesics and decongestants. His results such as blood routine, MRI and other neurological tests were fine. During the treatment he started to feel better and he started reducing the tablets little by little with consultation with doctor.

The acupuncture treatments were made in acupuncture clinic for acupuncture and TCM in Skopje, North Macedonia by a doctor specialist in acupuncture. Treatments were done once weekly with duration of 30-45 minutes. Treatments were done indoor, on a room temperature, with normal (dry) acupuncture with fine sterile disposable needles sized 0.25x25mm. Acupuncture points used in the treatments are: DU21, GB20, GV24, GB1, LI4, ST25, ST36, DU14, GB20, RN10, RN6, SP6, LV3 and 6 ashi points on the neck.

The treatment with TCM takes more time, but the aim is not to intoxicate the organism, but in the most natural way to help the body to heal with its own ability.

The treatment has a positive effect not only locally but also generally on all well-being. It helps in resolving stagnation, balances the energy, calms the spirit, nourishes the blood, Yin and Yang, relieves the pain, benefits the brain, strengthens the organs and expels all pathogenic factors like wind, cold, heat and dampness. The treatment with TCM take more time until positive result come, but the aim is not to intoxicate the organism, but in the natural way to help the body to heal with his own ability. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) dates back more than 5,000 years ago and includes variety of therapies, is safe, accessible, effective and affordable treatment. A main element of TCM is the holism meaning that the human being is seen as a whole and a part of nature. In TCM each patient is seen as an individual and for each patient the therapy is different. All medicines used in TCM are natural, which is one of the main benefits, which is contrary to western medicine. Modern medicine generalizes diseases, while Chinese medicine focuses on finding specificities and the root of the problem and treating them. According to TCM, the body is a system composed of Zang and Fu organs, chi, meridians and collaterals, blood, essence, body fluid, five sensory organs and nine body openings, limbs, bones, muscles, tendons, blood vessels and skin. The most important thing that TCM points to is to prevent the disease and to treat in time so as not to allow it to become serious. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) includes the quintessence of classical Chinese philosophy, science from ancient Chinese history and culture.^[6,7,8,9]

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion we can say that acupuncture, as part of the TCM, is a very helpful treatment for cluster headache, gives positive results and successfully is improving the health.

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Conflict of interest

The author have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Statement of Informed Consent

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for their anonymized information to be published in this article.

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