Acu News

"If you always give, you will always have." - Chinese Proverb

Stress & the Acupuncture Oasis

According to the Oxford dictionary, stress is "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances." At this point in our cultural (d)evolution, I think we can all agree that simply the requirements of survival, of 'keeping up' in our very complex world, constitute "very demanding circumstances". The past 20 months of living through a pandemic certainly qualify humanity on a whole as worthy of some much-needed stress relief.

In Acupuncture terms, stress can be thought of as a traffic jam, a blockage in the free flow of energy. This can be caused by external or internal forces. The Liver is the main organ in charge of processing stress and maintaining the healthy circulation of qi and blood in the body. Other Organs are also involved in the stress response in part because they hold emotional energies. While the Liver is mostly associated with the feeling of anger and frustration, the Spleen holds worry, and the Kidneys fear. These emotions are all natural and expected in certain amounts, but if healthy expression is restricted by stagnation, it can stir up or exacerbate stress.

Acupuncture is a powerful tool that serves to redirect traffic. Point locations are chosen based on each person's unique pattern in order to bring their individual system back into an open flowing state. From a Western medicine standpoint, Acupuncture can help us shift from a sympathetic to a parasympathetic state (from fight or flight to rest and digest). It has been shown to increase our natural painkillers and other happy hormones such as serotonin and dopamine while decreasing cortisol, our main stress hormone. It is also associated with enhanced reception of GABA, a neurotransmitter in the brain that tells our mind and body to relax. The other major stress-relieving power of acupuncture is its ability to increase heart rate variability, which is basically our flexibility in responding to and recovering from stress.

What kind of stress-relief you can expect from acupuncture:

- Decrease the severity of the stress response
- Shorten the recovery time from stress
- Provide an opportunity to rest, sleep or meditate comfortably, usually in a peaceful environment
- Occasionally stimulate the release of previously obstructed emotions which often results in a feeling of 'lightening the load'
- Help to relieve physical pain that contributes to stress levels
- Generate a sense of well-being

It is very common to leave the acupuncture office feeling much more at ease and at peace than when you arrived.

In between acupuncture sessions, it is important to find ways to limit exposure to environmental toxins and external sources of stress while developing better coping skills through healthy communication and practices such as breathwork and meditation. Exercises like tai chi and qi gong can help to keep energy pathways open and flowing to reduce internal tendencies toward stagnation. A point commonly used to support the Liver function of maintaining a smooth flow of qi is known as Tai Chong (LV 3) which translates to 'great surge'. You can find it on the top of the foot in the depression between the meeting place of the first 2 toe bones. When feeling stressed, try to remember to take a moment to breathe into the abdomen, and massage this point if accessible until you feel a sense of calm begin to replace the tension.

Your local acupuncture office can be an oasis of stress relief in a busy and challenging world. While the stress of daily life can leave us feeling worn out, going for an acupuncture treatment is an act of self-care and thus an act of empowerment. Call us today and set up your next stress-relieving session!

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