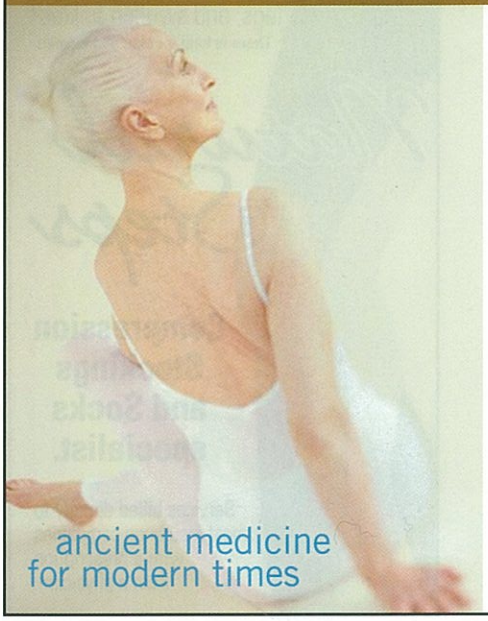
ARTHRITIS | CHRONIC FATIGUE | MENOPAUSE | DEPRESSION | DIGESTIVE COMPLAINTS



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ACUPUNCTURE *for anxiety*

by Corinna McFarlane & Jeff McMackin

Anxiety is a normal human emotion and most people will experience it to some degree as a response to stress. It is defined as a persisting state of fear that may or may not be associated with a specific object or situation, often accompanied by physiological changes such as a fast heartbeat and rapid breathing. Anxiety becomes pathological when it repeatedly interferes with daily life, is irrational, excessively prolonged or out of proportion with the cause.

Acupuncture has long been used in the treatment of anxiety disorders in China. Documentation of the traditional diagnosis and treatment can be found in the Huang Di Nei Jing (*The Yellow Emperors Classic of Internal Medicine*) a medical text dating back to the Han dynasty (*206 BCE-220 CE*). According to Oriental medical theory, anxiety is the emotion most frequently associated with disorders of the heart and instability of the shen. In the West the word "shen" is often translated as "spirit" or "mind". According to Chinese physicians shen is housed, or rooted, in the heart. It indicates the activity of thinking, consciousness, insight and memory, all of which depend on the heart. The shen is easily agitated by our response to stress and easily destabilized if the heart qi (energy) is deficient, resulting in anxiety.

Acupuncture is effective for anxiety because of its regulatory effect on the nervous system, moderating the release of chemicals and hormones to the brain, muscles and spinal cord. A series of trials from the Institute of Mental Health at Beijing Medical University compared the treatment of depression using electro acupuncture (EA) to treatment with the tricylcic antidepressant amitriptyline (AM). The results consistently demonstrate that EA is as effective as AM in the treatment of depression, and is even more effective in the alleviation of symptoms of anxiety, without the side effects of drug treatment.

The effectiveness of acupuncture in the treatment of mental distress is becoming more widely known in the west. In the context of drug addiction complicated by psychiatric disturbance, modern auricular acupuncture (ear acupuncture) treatment is playing a vital role in prisons, rehabilitation centers and mental health day centers across North America.

Together acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine are effective at ameliorating the withdrawal effects of conventional medications, while addressing the underlying physiological causes of the anxiety.