

getting to the POINT

ACUPUNCTURE EFFECTIVE FOR GERD

Heartburn, a burning sensation that radiates from the mid to upper chest, is a major symptom of a medical condition called Gastroesophageal Reflux Disorder (GERD).

The lower end of the esophagus (lower esophageal sphincter) is not a distinct muscular valve but rather an area of relatively high pressure that allows food to pass into the stomach and prevents acidic stomach fluids from backing up into the esophagus every time the stomach contracts. In healthy people it normally keeps the esophagus closed off from the stomach, but when this fails to function properly, the stomach acid backs up and irritates the unprotected lining of the esophagus, and heartburn occurs.

Although the cause of GERD is still unknown, there are various Western medical treatments to help relieve

symptoms, and some aimed at aiding tissue repair. However, all current treatments have limited effectiveness and involve side effects.

A 2005 Taiwanese study reported in the American Journal of Physiology - Gastrointestinal & Liver Physiology pointed out the effectiveness of electrical acupuncture point stimulation in reducing the key mechanism of GERD, transient lower esophageal sphincter relaxations (TLESRs). In people who have GERD, the muscle relaxes at the wrong times, allowing stomach acid to churn up into the esophagus and cause heartburn. By applying only mild stimulation to an acupuncture point on the wrist known as Neigun, researchers were able to reduce the frequency of TLESRs in research subjects from 6 to 3.5 an hour.

Traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture has been treating heartburn effectively for thousands of years. By adjusting the esophageal pressure, lowering gastric acid, and balancing the functions of the digestive organs, acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can help not only reduce the symptoms of heartburn, but more importantly, help the patient recover from the effects of GERD itself. **bm**

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