

Acupuncture Effective Treatment of Shingles Pain

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Shingles or herpes zoster is an acute viral disease caused by a herpes virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. Shingles is caused by a re-emergence of the virus, which has been lying dormant for years within the nerve cells. The virus causes inflammation of the spinal ganglion and a vesicular eruption along the area of distribution of the affected spinal nerves. Patients feel excruciating burning pain or tingling in the affected area.

If pain persists after the eruption or blisters have healed, the condition is called post-herpetic neuralgia. This chronic pain results from damage to the nerve fibers caused by the shingles infection.

Shingles appears in persons who have been exposed to chickenpox. The reactivation of the virus may be triggered by trauma, diseases like pneumonia or tuberculosis, injection of certain drugs, or stress, which suppresses immune function. About 10% of adults can be expected to get shingles during their lifetime, usually after age 50. The incidence increases with age so that shingles is 10 times more likely to occur in adults over the age of 60 than in children under 10, and more likely to reoccur in those with declining or compromised immune systems, such as those receiving chemotherapy.

Standard biomedical treatments for herpes zoster include analgesics for pain, antidepressants, and anticonvulsants, soothing lotions, wet compresses and steroids. Doctors now recommend starting anti-viral drugs within 72 hours of the first sign of the

shingles rash. Early treatment is believed to reduce the risk of post-herpetic neuralgia.

Acupuncture treatment accelerates the healing process through several mechanisms. Needle-induced endorphins systematically relax the whole body, which reduces the stress level. This process restores the function of the immune system, which in turn deactivates the virus and brings it under control. Local needling along the infected nerve stimulates an anti-inflammatory reaction and helps recovery or regeneration of the damaged nerve fibers. Acupuncture treatment can be used on its own or in conjunction with standard medical care. ☀




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