Acupuncture for Dercum’s Disease

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Abstract: Twenty Tunisian patients with Dercum’s disease were treated by surrounding acupuncture combined with cupping and ear acupuncture. The result showed that among the patients, 6 were significantly effective, 11 effective and 3 ineffective. The total effective rate was 85.0%. The difference of serum cholesterol, serum triglyceride and blood sugar before and after the treatment were of statistical significance (P<0.05 and P<0.01). In 17 cases the body weight was reduced by more than 3 kg.

Key Words: Obesity; Acupuncture Therapy; Embedding, needle; Auricular Acupuncture

Dercum’s disease is characterized by a part from adiposis, superficial and painful subcutaneous nodules which are often formed in the loose region around the joints, seriously affecting the normal activity of the patients. The following report is a clinic observation of 20 cases treated by the author in Tunisia.

General Materials

All the 20 patients were female, the age ranged from 43 to 67 years old and 70% were under the age of 60. The course of adiposis ranged from 3 to 22 years. Their weight was generally 30% exceeding the normal standard, ranging from 71 kg to 142 kg. Most of the patients were in the period of menopause, and some had experienced early menopause or early decline of sexual function.

In these patients, most of the painful subcutaneous nodules existed around the joints of knees and ankles and very few were found in the neck, waist and shoulders. The nodules were different in size (often 2 to 3 cm in the diameter) and felt tenderness lightly with pressure. The movements of the joints were evidently affected.

According to the division of obesity types, 4 cases were simple adiposis and over half of patients were partial to sweet or greasy foods, 12 cases began to experience adiposis after amenorrhea and menopause, evidently associating with the decline of sexual glands; 4 had mild diabetes and the attack was obviously due to neuralendocrine or metabolism disorder.

Therapeutical Methods

1. Acupuncture
Main point: Ashi point
Accompanied point: Shenmen(HT 7), Quchi(LI 11), Zusanli(ST 36), Yanglingquan(GB 34), Sanyinjiao (SP 6), Kunlun(BL 60) and Shenshu(BL 23).

Methods: Needles 0.38 mm in diameter and 50 mm in length were inserted around the painful subcutaneous liponodules and 2 needles on the opposite side were attached with a electrical stimulator (G6805) with a successive waveform and a specified intensity under the patient’s tolerance. The treatment lasted for 15-20 min each time. After withdraw, cupping was performed continuously.

The treatment was repeated once a day and ten days made up one course of treatment. The whole course of treatment lasted for 1 to 3 months in order to alleviate pain and to promote the restoration of the normal functions of the joints.

2. Ear embedding
Auricular points: Sanjiao(MA-IC 4, Fig. 1), Lung(MA-IC 1, Fig. 1), Stomach(MA-IC, Fig. 1) and Endocrine(MA-IC 3, Fig. 1).

Method: Each time bilateral of one point were embedded alternatively and fixed with transparent
adhesive tape. This improved fixing method could directly observe whether the point was infected so as to take immediate measures to stop it. If there was no infection, the needles were retained for 10 days. The whole course of treatment lasted for 3 months. To increase the therapeutical effect, the patients were advised to press the needles for 10 to 15 min half an hour before meal.

**Therapeutical Effect**

1. **Standards of therapeutical effect**

   **Significantly effective:** Remarkable easement of pain, normal movement of the joints, decreased size of the subcutaneous liponodules, lower blood-lipid and over 5 kg loss of weight.

   **Effective:** Easement of pain, improved movement of the joints, reduced tension of the subcutaneous liponodules to the surrounding soft tissues, decreased blood-lipid and about 3 kg loss of weight.

   **Ineffective:** The symptoms and signs were not changed after the treatment.

2. **Therapeutical results**

   Among the 20 cases, 6 were significantly effective, 11 effective, and 3 ineffective. The total effective rate was 85.0%, indicated that acupuncture is quite effective in treating Dercum's disease in the near future. In all cases the loss of weight was in varying degrees, except 3 cases. At the end of courses, 9 cases had 3 kg reduced, 5 kg in 8 cases and 10 kg in one case.

   After treatment, the blood-lipid level was improved (Table 1.). The triglyceride was most significantly reduced with a significant difference in statistics ($P<0.01$). The general trend of fasting blood sugar decreased in comparison with the previous level. However, compared with higher level of blood sugar in 4 cases of diabetic without insulin dependence before the treatment, the improvement of the latter was more remarkable. This shows that acupuncture is quite effective in regulating the balance of yinyang and promoting the homeostasis of the body.

**Discussion**

The patients with Dercum's disease in this group were all females and had been suffering from painful subcutaneous liponodules at certain region of their superfi cies for a long time. The patients all received physical examination and the test of blood sedimentation, antistreptolysin O and uricemia as well as X-ray on multiple regions, ruling out the subcutaneous nodules due to rhumatic fever, panniculitis and gout as well as the adiposis caused by diencephalic and pituitary factors or hyper-adrenocortism. Therefore the diagnosis was accurate.

Patients with Dercum's disease often experience terrible pain. Since these women are often in the period of menopause, their threshold of pain is usually reduced.