

Traditional Chinese Medicine in Gonarthrosis

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Abstract

Gonarthrosis is a degenerative joint disease that is typically characterized by the gradual loss of articular cartilage in the knee joint. It is also associated with other changes such as abnormal bone formation, reactive changes in the synovial membrane, and pathologic synovial fluid. Acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture are a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) techniques that can significantly help in treating of gonarthrosis, particularly in reducing pain and improving physical function. Both acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture have anti-inflammatory effects that can help to alleviate pain and reduce inflammation in the knee joint. In this article is presented a case of 62 year old woman with a main complaint of chronic knee pain due to gonarthrosis. Patient had this problem for more than two years. After 7 treatments, with a combination of acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture once weekly, the patient have reported improvements in self-assessment of pain using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS) score of 2 out of 10. The selected acupuncture points are: ST 35 (Du bi), ST 36 (Zu san li), ST 34 (Liang qiu), SP 10 (Xuehai), GB 34 (Yang ling quan), SP6 (San yin jiao). Fire needling was done on Ashi points i.e. trigger points found on places where the pain is most dominant or where the place is obviously inflamed. In addition to pain relief, the patient also reported an improvement in the physical function.

Key words - gonarthrosis, traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture treatment

Introduction

Gonarthrosis is a degenerative joint disease that affects the knee joint. It is characterized by the gradual loss of joint cartilage, which can lead to pain, stiffness, and reduced mobility.

Gonarthrosis, a condition that affects the knee joint, is viewed in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as an impediment disease that can be caused by various factors, including external pathogenic factors such as wind, dampness, and cold, as well as internal factors such as deficiency and stagnation. TCM recognizes that the knee joint relies on various structures, including bones, tendons, ligaments, and cartilage, to facilitate movement and support the body. [1]

Wind is considered to be the cause of around a hundred diseases in TCM and can cause havoc by moving pain from joint to joint. External pathogenic factors such as cold can also enter the body and cause severe pain, especially in the knee joint. Furthermore, aging is believed to involve the gradual reduction of vitality and vital substances, particularly in the kidneys, which govern the health of the lower limbs, ankles, feet, and knees. Therefore, during the treatment of gonarthrosis, patients may also be treated for weakness in the kidneys. Changes in weather can worsen knee pain, as external pathogenic factors such as cold or dampness can exacerbate the pain. In TCM, the absence of pain in muscles or joints is associated with the free flow of Qi and blood without obstruction. Pain can occur when there is a hindrance or blockage of Qi and blood flow through the channels and vessels, or when there is insufficient Qi and blood. Therefore, treatment for gonarthrosis in TCM aims to promote the free flow of Qi and blood to the affected knee joint to relieve pain and improve joint function. Overall, TCM recognizes the interconnectedness of the body and views gonarthrosis as a manifestation of imbalance in the body's internal and external environment. The holistic approach to treatment in TCM aims to restore balance and promote the body's innate healing ability, thus providing a comprehensive and effective treatment option for patients with gonarthrosis. [2] [3]

Case report

In this article is presented a 62 year old woman with a main complaint of chronic knee pain due to gonarthrosis. She has been experiencing pain in both knees for the past two years and reported difficulty walking and climbing stairs. She has tried various medications for pain relief, but they provided only temporary relief. Upon examination, the patient was found to have swelling and tenderness in both knees. She reported a pain level of 8 out of 10 on the VAS scale. She has no other significant medical history and was not taking any medications.

TCM provides a holistic approach that addresses the underlying causes of the disease. This case report presents the successful management of gonarthrosis using a combination of acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture therapy. The treatments were made in acupuncture clinic for TCM in Skopje, North Macedonia by a doctor specialist in acupuncture. The patient has made 7 treatment combination of acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture once weekly. Treatments were done indoor, on a room temperature, with a combination of normal acupuncture with fine sterile disposable needles sized 0.25x25mm, and fire needle acupuncture. For the fire needling was used sharp headed needle made of tungsten steel, which was heated by ethanol lamp and quickly inserted on the points and removed instantly. Fire needle acupuncture was performed on the most painful areas around the knee joint. This involved heating the needle and inserting it into the selected painful points called Ashi points. Acupuncture needles were inserted at specific points ST 35 (Du bi), ST 36 (Zu san li), ST 34 (Liang qiu), SP 10 (Xuehai), GB 34 (Yang ling quan), SP6 (San yin jiao). The treatment duration was 20-30 minutes. The patient received a total of 7 treatments combination of acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture over a period of seven weeks.

Acupuncture is an integral part of TCM and is believed to work in three ways to alleviate pain. Acupuncture's initial mechanism entails enhancing circulation in the afflicted region, resulting in the elimination of toxins and fluids induced by inflammation. This increased blood flow brings in more oxygen and facilitates faster tissue repair. Moreover, acupuncture helps to relax painful trigger points in the muscles and alleviate tension in the muscle fibers. Ultimately, acupuncture serves to naturally alleviate pain by instigating

the body's inherent healing processes. One effective technique within acupuncture is the fire needle technique, which is commonly used to treat arthritis, gonarthrosis, sports injuries, and tendonitis. This technique involves heating a specialized needle and then inserting it quickly into the affected area before promptly removing it. Fire needle acupuncture has been shown to improve blood circulation, reduce inflammation, eliminate calcifications and contractures, eliminate cold and dampness, and relieve pain. [4] [5]

After the first treatment, the patient reported a reduction in pain to 6 out of 10 on the VAS scale. After the third treatment, the patient reported a further reduction in pain to 4 out of 10. By the end of the treatment course, the patient reported a significant improvement in pain relief, with a VAS score of 2 out of 10. In addition to the pain relief, the patient also reported an improvement in the physical function. She was able to walk and climb stairs more easily than before the treatment. Patient reported significant improvements in pain, stiffness and mobility, indicating a substantial improvement in her quality of life. [6] [7]

Conclusion

As an integral part of TCM, the combination of acupuncture and fire needle acupuncture technique, as a non-invasive and holistic treatment proves to be highly efficacious in addressing knee pain, eliciting positive outcomes, and offering short-term pain relief. Through its various mechanisms, including improving circulation, reducing inflammation, and promoting the body's natural healing processes, acupuncture has been shown to effectively alleviate pain and improve overall function in individuals affected with this condition. With its non-invasive and natural approach, acupuncture represents a valuable addition to traditional treatment modalities for gonarthrosis and helps to enhance patient outcomes and quality of life.

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Conflict of interest

The author have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Statement of Informed Consent

Written informed consent was obtained from the patient for their anonymized information to be published in this article.

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