

Treating Hypertension with Chinese Medicine

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Hypertension is commonly referred to as 'high blood pressure'. This is a medical condition in which the blood pressure is chronically elevated. Hypertension can be classified into two kinds, namely Essential (primary) hypertension and secondary hypertension. Essential hypertension indicates that no specific medical cause can be found to explain a patient's condition. Secondary hypertension indicates that the high blood pressure is a result of other diseases, such as kidney disease and tumours (especially of the adrenal gland). In the early stages, the patient may just feel dizziness, headache, palpitation, insomnia, tinnitus, dysphoria and lassitude; in the later stages the organs such as the heart, brain, kidney and others may be involved. In the UK, about 16 million people have hypertension, which is more than one in four of the entire population.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), it is included in the categories of '*Xuan Yun*', meaning vertigo, '*Tou Tong*' meaning headache, or '*Ganyang Shangkan*' meaning hyperactivity of the liver-yang. TCM has rich experience in preventing and treating hypertension with acupuncture, herbal medicine, massage, etc.

Aetiology and Pathology

Essential hypertension is one of the most common complex disorders. For more than 90% of the patients with essential hypertension, the cause is unknown. However, a new study has found that about 30% of the patients with hypertension are associated with genetic heritability. More than 50 genes have been examined in association studies with hypertension and the number is constantly growing. There are other associated aetiologies, such as salt sensitivity, high renin level, insulin resistance, sleep apnea, etc. As for the remaining 10% of patients with secondary hypertension, there are some underlying causes, such as chronic kidney disease, hormonal disturbances and endocrine tumours. Basically, there are certain factors which can seriously aggravate hypertension and increase the risk of complications, such as obesity, smoking, diabetes Type 1 or Type 2, high alcohol intake, lack of exercise and some medications (such as steroids).

In TCM theory, hypertension can be caused by certain factors, such as an emotional disorder which may cause the stagnation of the liver-qi, which may develop into liver-fire or hyperactivity of the liver-yang; or an improper diet that could cause an accumulation of phlegm in the interior and then affect the movements of qi; or prolonged illness or overstrain or exhaustion due to intemperance in sexual life can cause yin-deficiency of the kidney and liver and further lead to an imbalance between yin and yang and as a result a pathogenic condition forms, i.e. yang-hyperactivity due to a yin deficiency; or exhaustion of essence-qi resulting in menopause causes

incoordination of the Chong and Ren Meridians. All the above factors can become a basic pathogenic condition to cause hypertension.

Common Patterns in TCM

1. Excess of liver –fire: The patient has headache, dizziness, red face and eyes, dysphoria, bitter taste, dark yellow urine, constipation, red tongue with yellow fur, and taut and forceful pulse.
2. Excess of phlegm-dampness: The patient has dizziness, heaviness of the head, accompanied with an oppressed sensation in the chest, nausea, vomiting, profuse sputum, greasy fur of the tongue, and slippery pulse.
3. Hyperactivity of yang due to yin-deficiency: The patient suffers from dizziness, headache, heaviness of head, lassitude in the loins and legs, tinnitus, amnesia, dysphoria, accompanied with feverish sensation in the chest, palms and soles, palpitation, insomnia, red tongue with thin fur, wiry and thready pulse.
4. Disharmony between the Chong and Ren Meridians :The patient complains of dizziness, headache, restlessness, insomnia, tinnitus, amnesia, shortness of breath, marked by irregular menstruation, red tongue with thin fur, wiry and thready pulse.

Diagnosis in Western Medicine

1. It has a gradual onset, in some case there are no initial symptoms. The patient may suffer from dizziness, headache, fullness of head, restlessness, temperamental tendency, insomnia, palpitation, numbness of extremities.
2. According to the 1999 WHO International Society of Hypertension (ISH) Guideline, hypertension is defined as systolic pressure (SP) greater than 18.7 kPa (140 mmHg) and diastolic pressure (DP) greater than 12.0 kPa (90 mmHg) without taking antihypertensive medication. Clinically, the elevation of diastolic pressure is of more significance for the diagnosis of hypertension.
3. In severe cases, or long term hypertension, the heart, brain and kidney may be compromised with the presentation of relevant symptoms.
4. Clinically, in some cases blood pressure may be markedly elevated abruptly under certain precipitating factors, presenting with severe headache, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, which is termed Hypertension Crisis. In severe cases, if there is loss of consciousness, convulsion, transient hemiplegia or aphasia, it can be called Hypertensive Encephalopathy.

5. Physical examination may find the aortic second sound accentuated and in elderly cases a metallic sound may be heard. In the case with prolonged hypertension, there appears to be left ventricular hypertrophy.
6. Routine urine examination during the early stages present as normal, but when renal function is damaged, protein, erythrocyte, and cast may be found in the urine.
7. All hypertensive patients should have a standard 12 lead ECG. This produces a baseline for future reference and will reveal evidence of myocardial ischemia, condition defects and left ventricular hypertrophy.
8. Echocardiography is increasingly available. It is more sensitive than ECG and is particularly helpful in further assessment of cardiac muscle condition.
9. Further investigations of brain, heart, kidneys and endocrine system may be appropriate in selected cases. Additional diagnostic tests will usually need specialist referral.

TCM Treatments

1. Body Acupuncture

Basic acupoints

Hegu (LI 4)

Quchi (LI 11)

Taichong (Liv3)

Zusanli (St36)

For excess of liver-fire, add Fengchi (G20), Xingjian (Liv 2), Zuqiaoyin (G44).

For excess of phlegm-dampness, add Fenglong (St 40), Zhongwan (Ren 12), and Neiguan (P 6).

For hyperactivity of yang due to yin-deficiency, add Shenshu (UB 23) , Ganshu (UB 18), Taixi(K 3), and Sanyinjiao (Sp 6).

For disharmony between the Chong and Ren Meridians, add Ququan (Liv 8), Guanyuan (Ren4) and Zhongji (Ren3).

Method: The reducing method and the even movement method are applied for excess of liver-fire, excess of phlegm-dampness. The even movement method is used for hyperactivity of yang due to yin-deficiency and disharmony between the chong and ren meridians.

2. Ear Acupuncture

Ear acupoints: Pt. heart, Pt. Liver, Pt. Middle border, Pt. Groove for lowering blood pressure, and Pt. Shenmen.

Method: 3-5 ear points should be selected for each time. The auricular-seed-pressing therapy can be used.

3. Herbal Therapy

(1) Excess of liver-fire

Therapeutic principle: Reducing liver-fire and calming liver-yang.

Recipe: Modified Longdan Xie Gan Tang/Decoction

Ingredients:

Longdancao (Radix gentianae) 9g

Huangqin (Radix scutellariae) 9g

Zhizi (Fructus gardeniae) 9g

Zexie (Rhizoma alismatis) 3g

Caojueming (Semen cassiae) 15g

Shijueming (Concha haliotidis) 15g

Shengdihua (Radix rehmanniae) 10g

Shengdahuang (Radix et rhizoma rhei) 3g, to be decocted later than others.

Mudanpi (Cortex moutan radicis) 9g

Gouteng (Ramulus uncariae cum uncis) 15g

Administration: The above herbs should be decocted in water for 20 minutes except Shengdahuang (Radix et rhizoma rhei), then add Shengdahuang (Radix et rhizoma rhei) and continue to boil all the herbs together for 10 minutes more. Strain the liquid from the herbs to obtain the decoction. Drink half in the morning and another half in the evening.

(2) Excess of phlegm-dampness

Therapeutic principle: Removing phlegm-dampness to lower blood pressure

Recipe: Modified Banxia Baizhu Tianma Tang/Decoction.

Ingredients:

Fabanxia (Rhizoma pinelliae) 9g

Baizhu (Rhizoma atractylodis macrocephalae) 10g

Tianma (Rhizoma gastrodiae) 9g

Fuling (Poria) 9g

Chenpi (Pericarpium citri reticulatae) 6g

Zexie (Rhizoma alismatis) 9g

Gouteng (Ramulus uncariae cum uncis) 15g
Sangjisheng (Ramulus taxilli) 15g

Administration: All the above herbs should be decocted in water for 25-30 minutes. Strain the liquid from the herbs to obtain the decoction. Drink half in the morning and another half in the evening.

(3)Hyperactivity of yang due to yin –deficiency
Therapeutic principle: nourishing yin to suppress yang.

Recipe: Modified Tianma Gouteng Yin /Decoction.

Ingredients:

Tianma (Rhizoma gastrodiae) 12g
Gouteng (Ramulus uncariae cum uncis) 15g
Shengshijueming (Concha haliotidis) 20g
Zhizi (Fructus gardeniae)9g
Chuanniuxi (Radix cyathulae) 9g
Duzhong (Cortex eucommiae) 15g
Sangjisheng (Ramulus taxilli) 15g
Yejaoteng (Caulis polygoni multiflori) 10g
Gouqizi (Fructus lycii) 12g

Administration: All the above herbs should be decocted in water for 25-30 minutes. Strain the liquid from the herbs to obtain the decoction. Drink half in the morning and another half in the evening.

(4) Disharmony between the Chong and Ren Meridians
Therapeutic principle: Regulating the Chong and Ren Meridians by nourishing yin and restore yang.

Recipe: Er Xian Tang/Decoction

Ingredients:

Xianmao (Rhizoma curculiginis) 10g
Xianlingpi (Herba epimedii) 10g
Bajitian (Radix morindae officinalis) 9g
Danggui (Radix angelicae sinensis) 15g
Huangbai (Cortex phellodendri) 6g
Zhimu (Rhizoma anemarrhenae) 10g
Duzhong (Cortex eucommiae) 12g
Gouteng (Ramulus uncariae cum uncis) 15g

Administration: All the above herbs should be decocted in water for 25-30 minutes. Strain the liquid from the herbs to obtain the decoction. Drink half in the morning and another half in the evening.

Prevention and advice

1. Every one near or past middle age should have regular routine blood pressure checks, especially if there is a family tendency for hypertension, in order to treat a early hypertensive condition as soon as possible.
2. Pinpoint possible risk factors and implement lifestyle changes, for example: smoking cessation, weight loss, moderate exercise, reducing alcohol intake, eating a varied diet, stress reduction methods.
3. Mild hypertension can be initially treated by diet. The diet should be rich in fruits and vegetables, low in fat or fat-free dietary foods; moderate or low intake of sodium which can effectively lower blood pressure. Additionally fruits, vegetables and nuts have the added benefit of increasing dietary potassium which offsets the sodium and acts on the kidney to decrease blood pressure.
4. Participate in recreational activities such as gardening, fishing, practicing calligraphy and painting, playing a musical instrument and appreciating music, etc.
5. Any kind of activities where the head is below the horizontal position should be avoided. It is not advisable to partake in vigorous or contact sports; additionally, instruct the patients to avoid any activity involving carrying heavier weights.
6. Sexual function is the human instinct and a part of life for every one including the patients with hypertension. According to our clinical experiences, regular gentle sexual intercourse can help the patients to get a good sleep and lower blood pressure.
7. Reduction of environmental stressors such as high sound levels and over-illumination can be an additional method of ameliorating hypertension.

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