



Japanese Acupuncture for Depression

Acupuncture is rapidly becoming a common alternative therapy for various physical disorders. But many people may not realize that Acupuncture also has a long history in the treatment of mental and emotional disorders, for mild to moderate depression, bi-polar disorder or seasonal affective disorder (SAD), Acupuncture can be very effective to drug treatment or as a supportive therapy.

In the United States, depression is by far the most common of the various mental and emotional disorders. From the perspective of the traditional medicine of Asia, depression is a form of fatigue, i.e., the life-energy of the body is either deficient or not being distributed evenly throughout the body. The result is a subjective experience of lifelessness, fatigue, lack of motivation, emptiness and even despair. In this system of medicine the lungs and the organs of digestion are considered the most important organs involved in the generation and distribution of life-energy. Therefore, in the treatment of depression, Japanese Acupuncture will look first to the lungs and the organs of digestion in order to locate the underlying pattern of imbalance. By strengthening the flow of energy in these two organ systems, symptoms associated with mild to moderate depression can often be resolved quickly.

It's interesting to compare this ancient perspective with western medical science, which views depression as a deficiency or imbalance in brain chemistry. According to western medicine, one of the most important chemicals supporting our mental and emotional well-being is the neuro-transmitter, serotonin. The importance of serotonin is underscored by the fact that most anti-depression drugs are designed to increase the concentration of serotonin in the brain. Even more interesting, researchers have found that a significant percentage of the body's available serotonin (some say as much as 80%) is produced in the gastrointestinal tract as a by-product of digestion.

In Japanese Acupuncture, we first perform what is called the "root treatment". That is, we locate and treat the weakest energy channel in order to correct the underlying pattern of imbalance. The tools of our examination are our sense. We look at the patient's facial expressions; the way they walk and carry themselves; we palpate the abdomen; listen to the quality of the voice; feel the texture, moisture and temperature of the skin, nails and hair; and we feel the pulses. From these examinations, we are able to determine the underlying imbalance and take steps to correct it. The purpose of this "root treatment" is to restore a balanced flow of energy throughout the body over the long term.

In addition, if the patient is experiencing fatigue, despair, lack of motivation, loss of appetite, insomnia, or any other particular symptoms of depression, there are specific techniques which help to remove the symptoms and restore more normal functioning. In particular, Japanese Acupuncture uses very superficial and light touch needling techniques, which have evolved over centuries in order to increase the patient's energy and lift the spirits. Sometimes, several treatments are needed. But for the most part, these methods do work to give the patients some immediate relief until the root treatment can begin to take effect. Both the root and the symptomatic treatments are important in order to maximize the overall effect.