

Acupuncture and Neck and Shoulder Stiffness

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Acupuncture can be a very effective solution when treating most neck and shoulder problems. Neck and shoulder muscle tension and stiffness are very common concerns, especially of people who work in an office. Sitting in front of a computer and typing for extensive periods of time causes a lack of circulation in the tissue and fatigue of the muscles involved. Neck stiffness can be also aggravated by other common reasons, many of which can be effectively treated with acupuncture.

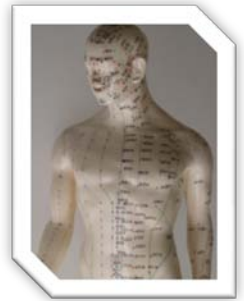


At the top of your neck, just below the hairline, there is an important acupuncture point called fuchi (GB20) which has been known to be closely connected to the eye. If you watch a computer screen or television for long periods of time and continuously strain your eyes, tightness can develop in this area, and sometimes a tight muscle mass forms. This area can also become quite tense with prolonged periods of thinking or mental concentration.

As a result, tightness at the top of the neck can influence autonomic nervous functioning and prolonged period of tension can cause a various symptoms such as headache, lack of concentration, poor memory, insomnia or irritability.

Other common sites of muscle stiffness that can be treated with acupuncture include the large muscle between the neck and the shoulder joint (the upper trapezius) and the muscles between the shoulder blades. Some psychologists believe that the amount of muscle tension in the upper trapezius reflects the emotional state of a person and consequently, attach electromyographic (EMG) electrodes to these muscles to help analyze a patient's emotional state.

The region in between the shoulder blades is traditionally referred to as the heart reflex area in oriental medicine. In oriental medicine, the heart does not refer solely to the heart organ as in western medicine, but rather encompasses a system that includes the circulatory system and emotional state. According to Nan-jing , an ancient medical text written over 2000 years ago, the area between the shoulder blades reflects the emotional state, a theory which agrees with my clinical experience. Many of my patients who are under constant worry or anxiety develop tension in the left side of the spine between the scapula. The left shoulder blade can be considered to be a reflection of the cardiac sympathetic nervous system. Tension here indicates hyper-sympathetic activity and prolonged inhibition of the parasympathetic nervous system due to consistent mental and emotional stress.



How can acupuncture help treat your neck and shoulder pain and stiffness?

As explained earlier, most neck and shoulder stiffness results from two factors: continuous mechanical strain and emotional stress. The treatment approach, then, must consider both aspects. In today's stressful society, since most people have chronic parasympathetic inhibition and excess sympathetic activation (typical symptoms include: irritability, insomnia, cold hands, feet, digestive problems, palpitations), we begin by balancing the nervous system. For this purpose, a parasympathetic activation method referred to as SES is used. Indirect Moxa (heat therapy) treatment may also applied to certain acupuncture points to increase local tissue circulation and to induce an additional relaxation response.

SES can relieve general tension, but more chronic, deep muscle tightness requires more direct stimulation. Needling stimulation is applied to the neck and shoulder muscles to further release muscle tightness. Low-frequency electric acupuncture treatment may also be utilized for certain cases.



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