

The patient is a 64-year-old female presenting with pain and swelling of the right ankle. The problem began about 6 months earlier, but the patient is unaware of any particular injury or triggering incident. When she gets out of bed in the morning, she feels an "electric" sensation through the center and sole of her foot. The timing of the pain is different every day: sometimes she wakes with tremendous pain, some days it only hurts if she does a lot of exercise. She reports limping most of the time. A podiatrist thought that the patient might have a bone spur, but wasn't sure; the patient was instructed to take ibuprofen, but she doesn't think it helps and she doesn't like taking pills. She has also tried to address the pain and swelling through the use of ice and elevation, but this also doesn't provide relief. The pain and swelling are concentrated just posterior to the medial malleolus (behind the inner ankle bone). Sometimes the pain is so severe that it hurts to turn her foot out at an angle. At her initial acupuncture appointment, the area was significantly swollen, and slightly warm to the touch, compared with the rest of her right leg and with her left ankle.

The patient is generally in good health. She loves to exercise and regularly participates in yoga, zumba, aerobics, weight lifting, and frequent walking. She has a history of back pain, but currently has no problems with her back; she attributes this largely to the fact that she exercises a lot. She also has an area of numbness on the outer thigh, close to her knee. She has been told that this is the result of a pinched nerve somewhere, but it is not severe enough to cause her any concern. She has high cholesterol and high blood pressure, both of which are controlled with medication. She has about one bowel movement per day with no problems, and does not report any digestive complaints. The patient eats well and does most of her own cooking. She gets about 7-8 hours of sleep per night and feels rested. She had a partial hysterectomy at the age of 43.

The patient's pulse was soft and slightly slippery, and measured about 76 beats per minute (a moderate rate). At some visits, her pulse was difficult to palpate because it was deep and soft. Her tongue was scalloped, slightly enlarged, and pale red with a thin, white, wet coat. She was slightly overweight, with a pear-shaped body type. The patient was very energetic and personable.

The patient's diagnosis was Spleen qi deficiency with damp accumulation in the lower jiao, and qi and blood stagnation in the Spleen and Kidney channels of the ankle. The treatment principle was to tonify and strengthen the Spleen, drain dampness and heat, move qi and blood in the channels, and reduce pain and swelling.

At the first treatment, points were selected for their ability to drain damp, clear heat, and move qi and blood in the channels. A combination of local points (around the ankle) and distal points (hands, and upper leg) were used. The points were concentrated on the Spleen and Kidney channels because of their location relative to the pain and swelling, and for their relationship to fluid metabolism. In addition, tendon lotion (a warming liniment made with herbs and vodka) was massaged into the patient's ankle.

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The patient returned to the office a week later and reported that she had less pain with her first step of the day, and that she thought the swelling was decreased. She was also walking without so obvious a limp. Similar acupuncture points were used at this treatment, as well as tendon lotion. The patient was instructed to use tendon lotion at home between visits, too.

At her third appointment, the patient said she was no longer limping, and that she thought her ankle was much better overall as far as pain and swelling. She stated that she used the tendon lotion a few times during the week. Again, a similar set of acupuncture points was used.

The patient returned to the office three more times over the next three weeks, for a total of six visits in six weeks. At her last appointment, she said that her ankle felt very good, that she was able to walk and exercise without pain, and that she felt acupuncture had helped her solve her ankle problem.