

The patient is a 31-year-old female, presenting with seasonal affective disorder. She reports feeling tired all the time, and says that the fatigue is "physical, mental, and psychological". She says that she does not feel especially sad or depressed. The current episode began about 2 months ago in early November when the days started getting shorter and there was less light, and has recurred every year at this time for the last 10 years. During these episodes, she craves sugar and alcohol, feels that "things are harder", and experiences a decrease in her ability to focus and get things done. She sleeps about 9 hours per night, but still does not feel rested when she wakes up. She typically has late insomnia, waking well before her alarm goes off in the morning. She reports that a moderate amount of exercise helps with the fatigue, but too much exercise makes the fatigue worse. Lately, she has not been exercising very much.

The patient has a history of constipation, and usually has a bowel movement every 5-7 days. She states that constipation is worse when she is going through an episode of seasonal affective disorder. She frequently has gas pains, stomach pain, and reflux symptoms; some of this is linked to difficulty digesting milk and wheat. Her diet is high in whole grains, vegetables, eggs, and fish, with occasional red meat and very few refined carbohydrates.

The patient is currently in good health and takes no medications or supplements. She has a history of adenoid cystic carcinoma, for which she had surgery in 1998 with no current problems. She experiences some mild environmental allergies and colds, but says that her immune system is generally "good". She has floaters in her vision, and no other eye or ear problems. Her menstrual cycle is regularly 30-32 days with bright red blood and some premenstrual moodiness and mild cramps. She has some acne and redness around her mouth, and on her chest; she attributed this to recent dairy consumption. She has cold hands and feet much of the time. She wakes up once per night to urinate.

At the first visit, the patient's pulse was about 60 beats per minute, wiry on the right side and slippery on the left side. Her tongue was slightly orange, redder at the tip, and had a dry white coat.

The patient's diagnosis is primarily Liver qi stagnation with heat in the Middle Jiao. The secondary diagnosis is Kidney and Spleen yang deficiency. The treatment principles are to move Liver qi, clear heat from the Middle Jiao, and tonify the Kidney and Spleen yang.

At the first visit, acupuncture points such as the Outer Four Gates and the Inner Four Gates were chosen to move qi, to directly address the chief complaint of fatigue as well as the constipation. Points on the top of the head were used to raise yang and improve focus. Points on the chest and feet were also selected to assist with clearing heat from the Middle and to address the constipation and redness on the face and chest. Essential oils of petitgrain and neroli were applied to the ribside area and temples (respectively), to help move qi and to improve mood.

The patient returned to the office one week later. She reported that she might be feeling slightly better, but wasn't sure. She thought the redness on her face was improving. At this visit, a similar acupuncture point prescription was selected, with a few additions and subtractions to more finely tune the treatment of fatigue, mood, and constipation. Since the patient was also interested in taking Chinese herbs, a modified version of Xiao Yao Wan was prescribed to move and smooth the Liver qi. The formula also contained elements of Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang, to raise clear qi and yang to the head. The patient took the herbs twice per day in raw (decocted) form, with a spoonful of honey to offset the bitterness of the herbs.

At her third appointment a week later, she said she felt like she had a lot of energy after the previous treatment, and that her bowel movements were more regular and frequent with less abdominal pain. At her fourth visit, she reported that she felt "normal in all ways". She said she felt energized and that she was able to get her work done. The area around her mouth was much less red (the patient stated that she switched to a non-fluoride toothpaste about 2 weeks earlier and thought that might be helping as well). She had some tightness in her shoulder blades, but otherwise felt much better. She had an herbal consult over the phone about 2 weeks later, in which she reported feeling very good and stable, and then she came in a final time a month later for a "tune up". She said she generally felt great, and that there were no significant changes since her phone consult. She asked for a refill of her herbs for an upcoming trip, and said she would call if her symptoms came back. She felt that acupuncture and herbs were very helpful in eliminating her seasonal affective disorder symptoms.