

The patient is a 29-year-old female presenting with a chief complaint of vertigo. The current episode of vertigo began about 4 months ago, with no known trigger at that time. She saw an ear-nose-throat specialist shortly after her symptoms started, and she was diagnosed with benign paroxysmal positional vertigo; the doctor performed the Epley maneuver. She states that this treatment relieved her of most of the symptoms, but she still has some lingering symptoms, for which she would like acupuncture treatment. The patient reports feeling dizzy and extremely nauseous, sometimes to the point of vomiting, when lying down or when changing positions abruptly. Specifically, she feels dizzy when lying on her right side, and when looking up or down, and the symptoms are worse when she first gets out of bed in the morning. She is also now prone to headaches on the back / left part of her head, although she had no history of headaches before this episode of vertigo. The headaches are dull and achy.

The patient reports that she fell on some ice about 11 years ago and hit her head. At that time, she experienced what she now knows to be vertigo, although the symptoms resolved on their own. The current episode started randomly, with no precipitating injury or incident. She had an MRI shortly after this episode began, but everything was negative on the MRI. She also underwent a hearing test to check for nerve damage in the ear, and that was negative as well. She sees a therapist who thinks this episode of vertigo is stress-related; she reports that her symptoms are not improved with rest or relaxation.

She is generally in good health aside from her vertigo symptoms. She had a heart murmur and asthma as a child, but does not currently have any problems relating to either diagnosis. At the age of 8, she was diagnosed with scoliosis; she outgrew that as well. The patient has a history of chronic sinus infections about 9 years ago, related to a deviated septum and some scar tissue in her sinuses. She has 1-2 bowel movements per day, with a history of hemorrhoids last year. She has been on various birth control pills for the last 10 years; her periods are regular and unremarkable. She says that she generally tries to eat well (with a focus on reducing animal products and alcohol since this episode of vertigo started), but will enjoy some unhealthy foods "in moderation".

The patient's pulse is about 68 beats per minute, and is slippery in the Lung, Heart, and Liver positions. The Spleen and Kidney positions are weak and difficult to palpate. Her tongue is pale red with a deep center crack, a thin white coat, and a slightly red tip. She makes good eye contact and is very personable. She seems relaxed during her appointments. She has a slightly soft, round body type. She sounds somewhat congested when she speaks.

The diagnosis for this patient is Spleen qi deficiency with phlegm-damp accumulation in the Upper Jiao (the upper portion of the body and head). The treatment principle is to tonify and strengthen the Spleen qi, and to dispel phlegm-dampness. At the first visit, points were selected to dispel phlegm from the Upper Jiao, including points on the Stomach channel of the leg and the Pericardium channel on the wrist. Ankle points known to eradicate phlegm and dampness were also used. Finally, points at the "corners" of the head (along the hairline) were also used.

The patient returned to the office one week later. She stated that for the first two days after her treatment, she felt about the same (no significant change), but then she noticed improvement on the third day, and has continued to feel better every day since that. She said that she was able to lie on her right side if she was careful, and that the vertigo symptoms were not triggered as easily as they were before her first acupuncture treatment. She still finds it difficult to look down without getting dizzy and losing her balance. At this treatment, similar acupuncture points were inserted again.

The patient came for a third acupuncture treatment a week later. She said that she was feeling much better overall. She was able to lie on her right side without any symptoms, and only felt vertigo symptoms with extreme movements; even then, she reported that the symptoms were very mild. She felt very positive about her progress and decided she did not need to come back for more treatments at that time. A follow-up discussion a couple weeks later revealed that she still felt good and was functioning normally.

About two years later, the patient returned to the office following a relapse of vertigo symptoms. She said that she had been feeling fine for the two years since her last acupuncture treatment, but that the vertigo symptoms returned after she had some red wine six days prior. This presentation was very similar to the last one: nausea, vomiting, and dizziness with extreme movements, discomfort while lying on her right side, and a frequent underlying feeling of spinning and nausea. Again, her pulse was slippery and soft. Her tongue was pale red with a slightly thicker white coat in the rear.

The diagnosis of Spleen qi deficiency with phlegm-damp accumulation in the Upper Jiao still appeared to be relevant, so a similar acupuncture treatment was used again. When she came back the following week, she reported that within 36 hours of her treatment, she felt totally normal, and was even able to flip her head over to blow-dry her hair without triggering any vertigo symptoms.

The patient came back to the office for an unrelated condition about 7 months later and reported that she had not had any vertigo symptoms since her last appointment. She was very pleased with the results of her acupuncture treatment for vertigo.