

Abdominal Acupuncture (fu zhen): Energetics and clinical applications

By: Tuvia Scott

Keywords:
Abdominal
Acupuncture,
fu zhen,
Abdominal
Meridian
System, AMS,
microsystem.

Abstract

The Abdominal Acupuncture (AA) system is an innovatory microsystem based on traditional acupuncture meridian theory. AA theory proposes that the Abdominal Meridian System (AMS) with Shenque REN-8 at its centre forms the fundamental regulating system of the human body. This article explores the basic theory and methods of AA, and is illustrated with two case histories from the author's own practice.

Introduction

Abdominal Acupuncture (AA) is a therapeutic microsystem, in which specific points and areas on the abdomen correspond to other parts of the body. AA is becoming more popular in China and the West, due to its efficacy in treating chronic, long-term conditions such as low back pain, musculoskeletal problems, neurological disorders, dizziness, tension, depression and digestive disorders (amongst others). The theory behind the system was developed by Dr. Zhiyun Bo¹ who, after years of research, established the new system in 1991. According to AA theory, acupuncture needles are used to stimulate the Abdominal Meridian System (AMS), the characteristics of which are based on a combination of traditional Chinese meridian theory and Dr Bo's innovations. AA is based on the idea that, at the embryological stage, the acupoint Shenque REN-8 forms the foundation of all regulating systems of the body. The AMS, with Shenque REN-8 at its centre, thus acts as the "mother"-system of the other acupuncture meridians, regulating the distribution of qi and blood to the whole body. By needling specific acupoints on the abdomen, the AMS can be used to correct disharmonies and bring about holistic balance (D'Albarto et al, 2005).

Energetics of Abdominal Acupuncture

The concept of the universe having an origin or source is fundamental to Chinese cosmology, and is mirrored on a smaller scale within the human body. Cosmic yuan qi is seen to be the source of the physical universe, and at the human level the zangfu and meridian systems also have their source energy (yuan qi) that derives from the heavens. According to Chinese medical theory, the area posterior to the acupoints Qihai REN-6 and Guanyuan REN-4, known as the lower dantian, is seen to be the seat of the body's yuan (source) qi and jing (essence).

The acupoint Shenque REN-8 is considered to be the entrance and exit point of the shen (Ellis et al, 1989). It is also considered to be a microcosmic reflection of the centre of the heavens, and therefore the origin of all movement and processes in the human body. This connection of the abdomen to the heavens can be observed in the nomenclature of the acupoints around the umbilicus, some of which are named after stars, such as Tianshu ST-25 (Heavenly Pivot), Taiyi ST-23 (Supreme Unity) and Zhongji REN-3 (Central Pole)².

"... it is said that the energy of the Heaven takes charge of the region above the center of the universe and that the energy of the earth takes charge of the region below the center of the universe; the energy of Man is guided by the region in which communication of energies takes place and from which the origin of everything is derived."³

(Lu, 1978; p.441)

According to AA, by concentrating acupuncture treatment in the abdominal region, all parts of the body can be treated, because the energy of the whole body is connected to this area.

Embryonic development and Abdominal Acupuncture theory

After a human egg has been fertilised, three layers of cells are formed in the developing embryo, which are known as the ectoderm, mesoderm and endoderm. These three layers eventually differentiate into the different tissues and organs of the body. Both the central nervous system (CNS) and the skin originate from the ectoderm. As the embryo grows, it develops into an elongated shape, with buds emerging from the upper and lower portions that later develop into upper and lower limbs. During the early stages of embryonic development, there is a constant and direct communication between the CNS, the continuously

growing skin, and the developing limbs. AA is based on these same connections, so that by stimulating the skin on the abdomen with acupuncture, it is possible to influence the CNS and treat the whole body.

Acupoints of the Abdominal Meridian System

Most acupoints used in AA will already be familiar to acupuncturists, because they are located on the traditional meridians that flow across the abdomen. The relationship of these abdominal acupoints with the rest of the body is as follows:

- The internal branch of the Kidney meridian threads through the spine and enters the Kidney. Abdominal points on the Kidney meridian can treat disorders of the lumbar spine, e.g. Qixue KID-13 treats disorders of the fourth to the fifth lumbar vertebrae.
- The Stomach meridian (yangming) distributes qi and blood to the extremities⁴. Abdominal points on the Stomach meridian can treat disorders of the limbs, e.g. Huaroumen ST-24 treats disorders of the arm and shoulder; Wailing ST-26 treats disorders of the hip and leg.
- The Spleen governs the flesh or muscles. Abdominal points on the Spleen meridian can strengthen the Spleen and benefit the muscles, e.g. Daheng SP-15 treats pain in the whole body, lumbar pain due to muscle tightness and heaviness of the limbs due to dampness.
- The Conception vessel (Ren Mai) has an internal branch that arises in the pelvic cavity and ascends along the spine. Abdominal points on the Conception vessel can treat problems of the head and spine, e.g. Xiawan REN-10 treats disorders of the cervical spine, Guanyuan REN-4 treats disorders of the lumbar spine.

Using points around Shenque REN-8 can have a psychogenic effect. For example, Zhongwan REN-12, Guanyuan REN-4, and Tianshu ST-25 are collectively known as the "diamond"; needling these points can help patients who are tired and disorientated due to experiencing adversity in life. Needling Huaroumen ST-24 and Wailing St-26 bilaterally is known as the abdominal "Four Gates", and can effectively treat tension, anxiety and depression.

The areas of influence of the acupoints used in AA are often represented by superimposing a picture of a tortoise over the abdomen, with its head and tail covering the points Zhongwan REN-12 and Guanyuan REN-4 respectively (and front and back legs covering other areas of the abdomen). Based on this system of correspondence, diseases of the head region are treated with the point Zhongwan REN-12, Yindu KID-19 and other surrounding points. The shoulder corresponds to Huaroumen ST-24 and the hip to Wailing ST-26. The area corresponding to the lower back reaches from the point Qihai REN-6 down

to Zhongji REN-3. To treat the vertebrae of the lower back one should choose points at a corresponding height on the abdomen.

Needle technique and clinical applications

According to AA theory, the depth of needling is significant and will affect the therapeutic outcome:

1. Deep needling (heaven) is used to regulate the zangfu.
2. Medium needling (man) is used to regulate the meridians.
3. Shallow needling (earth) is used to treat symptoms.

AA needling tends to be more superficial than the needling seen today in modern China. The skin tissue is needled through its superficial layers without obtaining deqi; this means that treatment is painless and therefore more acceptable to many patients. Needle size is usually 0.25mm in diameter by 40mm in length and the needles are retained for 30 minutes. Treatment is given two to three times a week. Usually there is some improvement in the condition being treated after just one treatment, although, depending on the severity of the problem, it may take longer to notice results. AA can be used on its own as the sole treatment, or it can be combined with other acupuncture points or techniques.

Case study 1

A 67 old female presented at the clinic suffering from lower back pain, which had been affecting her for the previous three months. She appeared weak, thin and depressed. She was finding it difficult to walk because of her back pain and had to spend most of the day lying down. Two years previously she had been diagnosed with a rare post-leukaemia disease called myelodysplastic syndrome⁵. She had received chemotherapy treatment and was now taking preventive medication on a regular basis. Even though she still had the disease, she had been able to lead a normal life until the back pain started. Previously to coming for acupuncture she had checked with her oncologist in order to rule out the possibility that her back pain was related to her disease. She had then visited an orthopaedic specialist and was sent to have a CT scan, which showed a herniated disk between the fourth and fifth lumbar vertebrae.

Because of her disease, she was not permitted to take any medication for her pain. She tried physiotherapy without much improvement in the condition. During her initial consultation she told me: "I have the strength to cope with my cancer and I am very optimistic, but the back pain has made me feel really sick. I spend more time in bed with my back pain than I do with the cancer". In addition to this, she had a severe problem with blood clotting because of her disease, so that even the slightest bleeding could be dangerous. Deep needling was therefore contraindicated in her case. After consulting with her oncologist to discuss

the possibilities of AA, we began treatment using the following points:

- Qihai REN-6 to tonify qi and strengthen the back.
- Guanyuan REN-4 to tonify Kidney qi and strengthen the back.
- Qixue KID-13 to treat the lumbar spine at L4 to L5.
- Shuidao REN-9 to treat prolapsed lumbar disk.
- Daheng SP-15 to relieve muscle spasm and pain.

This combination of points is a specific protocol used in the AA system to treat chronic lower back pain. After two treatments she started to feel much better and spent less time in bed. After five treatments she was able to sit on the ground and play with her grandsons and felt more energetic. After a series of eight treatments she was again able to lead a normal life with complete relief from her back pain.

Case study 2

A 64 old female presented in clinic suffering from dizziness, slight deafness of the right ear and attacks of facial paralysis on the right side of her face. The attacks of facial paralysis appeared frequently throughout the day and lasted for between three and five minutes. She worked as an occupational therapist and her symptoms were making her feel uncomfortably self-conscious. Six months previously she had been diagnosed with a glomus tumour⁶ on the tympanic membrane of the right inner ear. Her neurologist had told her that if her symptoms deteriorated further she might need surgery to remove the tumour. Her other symptoms included constipation and insomnia. I diagnosed her condition as a Kidney deficiency, and prescribed AA for the dizziness and for general strengthening of her vitality, with local acupuncture on the right side of her face for the facial paralysis. The following points were used:

- Zhongwan REN-12 the main point in AA to affect the head and face.
- A point 0.25 cun lateral to Zhongwan REN-12 (on the right hand side) to affect the face.
- Shangqu KID-17 and Huaroumen ST-24 to encourage the flow of qi to the head.
- Qihai REN-6 to promote the movement of qi in the body.
- Huangshu KID-16 to harmonise the Heart and Kidney.
- Guanyuan CV-4 to tonify Kidney qi.
- Yifeng SJ-17, Xiaguan ST-7, Dicang ST-4 and Yangbai GB-14 were used locally with Hegu L.I.-4 on the left hand to help promote the movement of qi in the right side of the face.

After three treatments her facial attacks became less frequent, and after ten treatments ceased altogether. Her dizziness, constipation and insomnia also improved significantly. There was no change in her deafness. After a new MRI scan her neurologist told her that, although the tumour was still in evidence, it had not grown and

surgery would not be required. Her next checkup was scheduled for one year.

Conclusion

Abdominal Acupuncture (AA) can be compared to other acupuncture microsystems such as auricular or hand acupuncture. It differs from these systems in so far as its theory is rooted in the traditional acupuncture meridian system and the basic principles of Chinese medicine. AA treatment is aimed not only at treating symptoms, but also at balancing the energy of the whole body in a simple and effective way. AA theory is relatively simple and can be learned by an experienced acupuncturist in a short time. Knowledge and understanding of the AA needling method must, however, be mastered in order to obtain good therapeutic results. ■

Tuvia Scott has been a practitioner and teacher of Chinese Medicine since 1994. He is the Academic Director of the Chinese Medicine Department at the School of Complementary Medicine, Tel Aviv University Sport and Health Center, and a member of the board of the Israeli Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine. He learned abdominal acupuncture during several trips to Chinese hospitals in Beijing, Hangzhou and Guangzhou. He can be contacted at [tuvias@gan.org.il](mailto:tuvia_s@gan.org.il).

References

- D'Alberto, A & Kim, E, (2005). *An Interview with Zhiyun Bo, inventor of Abdominal Acupuncture (Fu Zhen)*. www.acupuncturetoday.com 10 Jan 2005.
- Ellis, A & Wiseman, N, (1989). *Grasping The Wind*. Paradigm Publications: Brookline.
- Lu H C (1978). *A Complete Translation of the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*. Academy of Oriental Heritage: Vancouver.
- 2 Translations from Ellis et al, 1989.
- 3 In this quotation of *Su Wen* chapter 68 the "region in which communication of energies takes place" probably refers to Huaroumen ST-25 (Heavenly Pivot).
- 4 "The Yang Ming is in charge of flesh, and its meridian has abundant blood and abundant energy", *Su Wen* Chapter 30 (see Lu, 1978).
- 5 A haematological condition caused by ineffective production of blood cells, with the risk of development into acute myelogenous leukaemia.
- 6 A relatively uncommon, benign tumour.

Endnotes

- 1 Dr Bo has subsequently founded Bo's Abdominal Acupuncture Academy in Beijing.