The treatment of Headaches with Acupressure.

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Nearly everyone will suffer from a headache at some time. Some estimates say that up to 50 million Americans suffer from severe, long-lasting, recurring headaches. Most headaches though, are not necessarily symptomatic of another condition. However they can be very distracting and account for significant amounts of time lost from work.

Tension headaches are the most common type of headache, followed by migraines and sinusitis (9:1 ratio). The main symptoms the patient will complain of will be pain, tingling, burning of the occipital area (nape), throbbing to the top of the head and temporal area, forehead and/or face. Migraine headaches typically affect women more frequently than men. The pain is usually on one side of the head and so severe they can cause loss of appetite, blurred vision, nausea or even vomiting.

Recent research has also revealed headaches that are cervicogenic in nature. Compression of the greater occipital nerve (C2) by the trapezius and the lesser occipital nerve (C2–3) by the sternocleidomastoid muscles can occur from neck injuries. Both nerves are superficial and therefore direct trauma or microtrauma from repetitive strain over time will cause muscle spasm that in turn will irritate the nerve.

The most common treatments are NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), which often produce secondary effects (upper GI disorders) such as nausea, vomiting, heartburn and diarrhea. Common bodywork approaches are physical therapy, massage with stretch exercises.

However, in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), acupressure as part of Tui-Na (Chinese medical massage) has been found to work effectively for tension headaches and migraines.

Examination of the area involved is performed with the head flexed forward. Certain acupressure points are palpated with mild to moderate pressure. On a scale of 1-10, where 1 is almost no pressure and 10 is extreme, mild pressure would qualify as 2-3/10 and moderate as 5/10. This is to reproduce the patient’s complaints. Again these complaints would be: burning, numbness, tingling, pain that would radiate from the trapezius and cervical muscles areas upward, to the top of the head and along the temples to the eye. The channels involved would be the Urinary Bladder channel (UB) and the Gallbladder channel (GB).

Acupressure points palpated would be UB 10 near C-2-3-4 bilaterally and GB 20 on either side and behind the Sternoceleidomastoid (SCM) muscle, under the mastoid process. In addition there are so-called extra points or Ah-shi points, which are experiential sore points along the base of the skull or on it. These points are not on any channel, but qualify as acupressure points according to TCM.
Treatment is done by gently rotating a finger or thumb with mild pressure counterclockwise, or right – to – left. Counterclockwise releases the sensitivity and pain. Points are addressed bilaterally in sequence. The duration of treatment is up to two minutes until the pain is substantially reduced or gone Afterwards, the points and areas are again palpated mildly.

Release is not only done on the Gallbladder and Urinary Bladder channel but on the Governor Vessel (GV) (meridian) on top of the head and on the mid-sagittal line from the frontal hairline to behind the vertex of the head. The therapist will do static acupressure by holding a point for four to five seconds at a time. The starting point is on the frontal hairline and the end point is behind and below the vertex of the head. Up to ten repetitions or sweeps are done from the front to the back. Each time when reaching the end point, the therapist should start at the front again. This channel is excellent for calming the nerves, settling the mind, focusing thinking, pain relief and better memory. It also strengthens all channels and the back, since it runs along the vertebral border of the spine.
Photo 2: Location of GV 20 on the midsaggital line of the head and behind the posterior border of the ears. Treatment with double thumb technique for better focus.

Lastly, the Liver Channel (LIV) is addressed, because tension in the liver channel and organ is always associated with migraines and tension headaches. The liver channel also controls the tendons and attachments of muscles. Of particular interest is Liver Point 3. Its Chinese name is “Great Surge”, implying a great release and pouring of plentiful qi through the channels once the stagnation is dispersed. Its function is to also lift depression, alleviate pain, calm the emotions.

Treatment frequency for all the types of headaches mentioned is three times a week ideally for 2–3 weeks.
Photo 3: Location of LIV 3 point between the first two metatarsals and in front of the cleft where they split,

Acupressure for headaches is non-invasive and non-confrontational because of its gentleness and the fact that it works with the patient’s universal life energy or Qi.

REFERENCES: