

Acupuncture and The Pain In The Neck

By Jill Ellen Smith

I am amazed at how many of us (me included) have issues with neck and shoulder pain. The reason I titled this article “the pain in the neck” is because it points to the body/mind/spirit conversation that eastern medicine always addresses.

There are emotional as well as physical and nutritional (which includes the water issue) factors that I will talk about here.

First of all, always remember that the old song with the lyrics, “the hip bone is connected to the neck bone,” is very true. The body can’t be divided up for repair like a car. Neck and shoulder pain is usually manifested as tightness in the muscles and tendons in that area. The tightness can impinge on nerves, which will cause a radiating pain (sharp and shooting, or dull and achy, or numb and tingling). Often there are trigger points in the area, which are like bundled up muscle fibers that will cause a radiating pain down the arm or back when pressure is applied.

Many of my neck issues are due to the bone spur on my right foot that affects how I walk. As my ankle and leg muscles tighten up on the right side, the pain works its way up to my hip and all the way up to my shoulder and neck on the same side. I manage it with proper arch supports in my shoes as well as regular massage and acupuncture.

Acupuncture is extremely effective for my patients when needles are placed on the neck and shoulder area. I often incorporate electrical stimulation (which is not painful and actually feels soothing). This is referred to as “channel” work. The meridians (or channels of “qi”) are being directly treated. Sometimes cupping or even moxa is incorporated. Moxa is an herb that is placed on the skin or on the needle and then lit so that the therapeutic heat and healing properties can permeate into the area. These are examples of the local/physical approach to the treatment.

Frequently, it’s the stressors of life (emotional and even just the daily logistical stress) that contribute to our muscles tightening up. Think about it—when we are stressed, the qi and the blood simply do not flow adequately. The muscles require the healthy properties of qi and blood in order to remain supple and relaxed. I always incorporate points that help my patients to relax and to treat the meridians (or officials) that are responsible for our emotional state and the smooth flow of qi. Usually the very first treatment is an extensive clearing treatment that has a major impact on how a person’s body is responding to the stress of life. After that treatment, we then will move on to the local work (previously described) as well as the specific spirit level work and emotional level work unique to each patient.

Nutritionally I find that most of my patients do not drink enough water. Half your body weight in ounces of water is the standard recommendation. I find that if I don’t use a 25 ounce bottle that I know to refill a certain number of times/day, then I find it difficult to remember to drink enough water myself. It is a habit that takes some time to develop...but it is very important! Remember your body is 75 percent water. When adequate hydration is combined with a healthy nourishing diet, then the muscles and tendons have the foundation necessary to respond to healing interventions. Without adequate hydration and nutrition, the muscles

begin to feel and behave as if they are “dry rotted” as I like to call it. Dry rot is an image that most people respond to!

A healthy diet must incorporate 7-10 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with healthy protein every day. I coach my patients on ways to accomplish this and how to tweak their present nutrition lifestyle. Supplementation is often necessary, and I also coach my patients on how to navigate their way through the overabundance of supplements on the market today. Here is a hint: always look for gold standard research on any supplement you choose to put into your body (clinical research on that particular supplement on real human beings; double blind, placebo controlled, independent, randomized, and peer reviewed). You should be able to find this research on the product’s website.

So, remember, there is hope. Neck and shoulder pain is extremely responsive to a holistic approach to treatment and it is also often a way to avoid surgery. If surgery is necessary, then acupuncture treatment can facilitate and promote the healing process.

I look forward to being able to answer any of your questions about your neck and shoulder pain. Please do contact me so we can discuss if acupuncture would be right for you. And I do take most insurance now for your treatment.

Remember, pain is simply your body’s way of trying to get your attention so that you can begin to restore your own balance. Your body is your friend—not your enemy—and it is simply communicating with you.

About the Author

Jill Ellen Smith is an RN and Licensed Acupuncturist. She is a graduate of the Traditional Acupuncture Institute (TAI Sophia) in Laurel, Maryland and is nationally certified with the National College of Chinese and Oriental Medicine. Jill enjoys her practice at Valley Wellness in Lutherville and her private practice in Catonsville where she applies her 35 years of work in the healing arts to her acupuncture work. You can contact her at 410-788-1851 or email acuejillone@verizon.net or go online to www.baltimore-acupuncture.net.



Jill Ellen Smith



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