

Acupuncture and Common Headache Patterns

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In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), headaches are not viewed as a single condition. Instead, they are considered a symptom of underlying imbalances involving the flow of Qi (energy), Blood, Yin, Yang, and the Organ Systems. The location, quality, triggers, and accompanying symptoms help determine the root cause.

1. Liver Yang Rising Headache

This is one of the most common headache patterns in modern life.

Symptoms

- Throbbing or pounding headache
- Usually affects the temples or sides of the head
- Dizziness
- Irritability or anger
- Red face or eyes
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears)
- Elevated blood pressure

Common Causes

- Chronic stress
- Emotional frustration
- Lack of sleep
- Excessive caffeine or alcohol

TCM Goal

Calm Liver Yang, nourish Liver Yin, reduce internal wind.

2. Liver Fire Headache

A more intense version of Liver Yang Rising.

Symptoms

- Severe pounding headache
- Red eyes
- Bitter taste in the mouth
- Anger or explosive emotions
- Constipation
- Facial flushing

Common Causes

- Long-term stress
- Excessive alcohol
- Spicy foods
- Suppressed emotions

TCM Goal: Clear Liver Fire and cool excess heat.

3. Wind-Cold Headache

Often associated with the onset of a cold or exposure to cold weather.

Symptoms

- Tight, aching headache
- Pain in the back of the head and neck
- Aversion to cold
- Chills
- Minimal sweating

Common Causes

- Exposure to wind and cold
- Weak immune system

TCM Goal: Release the exterior and expel Wind-Cold.

4. Wind-Heat Headache

Common during viral infections or seasonal allergies.

Symptoms

- Headache with fever
- Sore throat
- Thirst
- Nasal congestion
- Red eyes

Common Causes

- Viral infections
- Environmental heat
- Seasonal pathogens

TCM Goal: Clear heat and release Wind-Heat.

5. Phlegm-Damp Headache

A heavy, foggy type of headache.

Symptoms

- Heavy sensation in the head
- Brain fog
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Sinus congestion
- Feeling worse in humid weather

Common Causes

- Poor digestion

- Excess dairy, sugar, processed foods
- Spleen Qi deficiency

TCM Goal: Transform phlegm, strengthen digestion, drain dampness.

6. Blood Deficiency Headache

Often seen in women, postpartum patients, or those recovering from illness.

Symptoms

- Dull headache
- Worse with fatigue
- Dizziness
- Pale complexion
- Dry skin
- Poor memory
- Insomnia

Common Causes

- Heavy menstruation
- Poor nutrition
- Chronic illness
- Overwork

TCM Goal: Nourish Blood and support the Liver and Spleen.

7. Kidney Deficiency Headache

Common with aging, burnout, and chronic stress.

Symptoms

- Chronic headache
- Low back pain
- Weak knees
- Fatigue

- Poor concentration
- Tinnitus

Common Causes

- Aging
- Excessive work
- Chronic illness
- Lack of restorative sleep

TCM Goal: Tonify Kidney Essence and nourish Yin or Yang depending on the pattern.

8. Blood Stagnation Headache

Typically associated with chronic or traumatic headaches.

Symptoms

- Sharp, stabbing pain
- Fixed location
- Long-standing headaches
- Worse at night
- History of head injury

Common Causes

- Trauma
- Chronic tension
- Poor circulation

TCM Goal: Invigorate Blood and remove stagnation.