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Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine for the Treatment of Pernicious Anemia

By: Vanessa Vogel Batt, L.Ac., MSTOM

Pernicious anemia is a blood disorder that occurs when the body ceases to absorb adequate amounts of vitamin B12, called cobalamin. This happens when certain cells found in the stomach (parietal cells) no longer produce a protein known as intrinsic factor. Intrinsic factor is needed to help the small intestine absorb vitamin B12. When cobalamin is lacking, this negatively affects the blood, as one of its vital functions is to assist in the production of red blood cells. Healthy red blood cells are necessary for delivering oxygen to the cells.

When the body is deprived of red blood cells, there are several types of anemia which may result. In the case of pernicious anemia, either the body is not able to absorb sufficient amounts of vitamin B12 or a person is not eating a diet rich enough in this important nutrient. As a consequence, symptoms of pallor (a sickly, pale appearance) and fatigue may occur. Other symptoms include fast or irregular heart rate, vertigo and dizziness, unclear and difficulty thinking, shortness of breath, headaches or cold hands and feet

It is important to treat pernicious anemia as early as possible to avoid complications. If left untreated for too long, neurological complications may ensue. This can include problems with walking, balance and cognitive function. At worst, in the absence of any treatment, these symptoms may become permanent. Fortunately, acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help treat the symptoms of pernicious anemia.

Since pernicious anemia is a blood disorder which originally starts with a problem in the stomach or intestines, particular attention may be paid to treating your digestive organs. It is the goal of the acupuncture treatments to ensure all your digestive organs can properly extract nutrients from food. These nutrients, in turn, are vital in the production of robust, healthy blood. In this way, acupuncture can help relieve the symptoms of pernicious anemia.

Many of the symptoms of pernicious anemia point to a problem with the circulation of blood. For instance, cold hands and feet indicate that blood is not flowing properly. Headaches, as well, can indicate that blood circulation is weak. In this case, it will be necessary to select acupuncture points that will strengthen the blood so it may flow more vigorously to help relieve symptoms of pernicious anemia. Which acupuncture points are chosen will be determined by your practitioner and based on where the blood is being restricted.

In addition to a personalized acupuncture treatment plan, your acupuncture and Oriental medicine practitioner can offer advice regarding which foods can best help relieve symptoms. Foods that may help anemic conditions in general, include red meat, bone marrow, molasses, soy milk, kidney beans, aduki beans and dark, green leafy vegetables. Non-animal product sources of vitamin B12 include fortified grains and some fortified tofu products, as well as synthetic vitamins.

Find an Acupuncturist near you to learn how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you!

About the Author: *Vanessa Vogel Batt, L.Ac., MSTOM, studied at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, and practiced acupuncture and Oriental medicine in New York for several years. Vanessa enjoys traveling the world, and has published articles on acupuncture and Oriental medicine and related health topics for websites and publications in both the U.S. and abroad.*

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