

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress. It helps one deal with a tense situation in the office, study harder for an exam, keep focussed on an important speech. In general, it helps one cope. But when anxiety becomes an excessive, irrational dread of everyday situations, it has become a disabling disorder.

1. ANXIETY IN WESTERN MEDICINE

The anxiety disorders discussed in Western medicine are:

- generalized anxiety disorder
- panic disorder
- obsessive-compulsive disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- social phobia (or social anxiety disorder)
- specific phobias.

Each anxiety disorder has its own distinct features, but they are all bound together by the common theme of excessive, irrational fear, worry and dread.

A chronic state of anxiety is usually called Generalized Anxiety Disorder. The essential characteristic of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is an excessive uncontrollable worry about everyday things. This constant worry affects daily functioning and can cause physical symptoms.

GAD can occur with other anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, or substance abuse. GAD is often difficult to diagnose because it lacks some of the dramatic symptoms, such as unprovoked panic attacks, that are seen with other anxiety disorders; for a diagnosis to be made, worry must be present more days than not for at least 6 months.

Physical symptoms may include:

- Muscle tension
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Cold, clammy hands
- Difficulty in swallowing
- Jumpiness
- Gastrointestinal discomfort or diarrhea
- Irritability, feeling on edge
- Tiredness
- Insomnia

A panic attack is defined as the abrupt onset of an episode of intense fear or discomfort, which peaks in approximately 10 minutes, and includes at least four of the following symptoms:

- a feeling of imminent danger or doom
- the need to escape
- palpitations
- sweating
- trembling
- shortness of breath or a smothering feeling

- a feeling of choking
- chest pain or discomfort
- nausea or abdominal discomfort
- dizziness or lightheadedness
- a sense of things being unreal, depersonalization
- a fear of losing control or "going crazy"
- a fear of dying
- tingling sensations
- chills or hot flushes.

2. ANXIETY IN CHINESE MEDICINE

"Anxiety" is a modern term that does not have an exact equivalent in Chinese medicine. I shall discuss the view of anxiety in Chinese medicine according to the following topics:

a) Chinese Disease Entities Corresponding To Anxiety

There is no Chinese medicine term that corresponds exactly to what we call "anxiety" but several ancient Chinese disease entities closely resemble anxiety. The two main disease entities that correspond to Anxiety are:

- "Fear and Palpitations" (Jing Ji)
- "Panic Throbbing" (Zheng Chong)

Both these conditions involve a state of fear, worry and anxiety, the first with palpitations and the second with a throbbing sensation in the chest and below the umbilicus. "Fear and Palpitations" is usually caused by external events such as a fright or shock and it comes and goes: it is more frequently of a Full nature, "Panic Throbbing" is not caused by external events and it is continuous: this condition is usually of an Empty nature and is more serious than the first. In chronic cases, "Fear and Palpitations" may turn into "Panic Throbbing". In severe cases, "Panic Throbbing" may correspond to panic attacks. Despite the name "Fear and Palpitations", such states of fear and anxiety may occur without palpitations.

b) Rebellious Qi Of The Penetrating Vessel (Chong Mai)

There is a third Chinese condition that may correspond to anxiety and especially to panic attacks and that is the condition of Rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel (Chong Mai) causing the symptom of "internal urgency" (li ji).

One of the most common pathologies of the Penetrating Vessel is rebellious Qi and "internal urgency" (Li Ji): this has been recognized since the times of the "Classic of Difficulties" (Nan Jing). Chapter 29 of the "Classic of Difficulties" says: "The pathology of the Penetrating Vessel is rebellious Qi with internal urgency (li ji)."

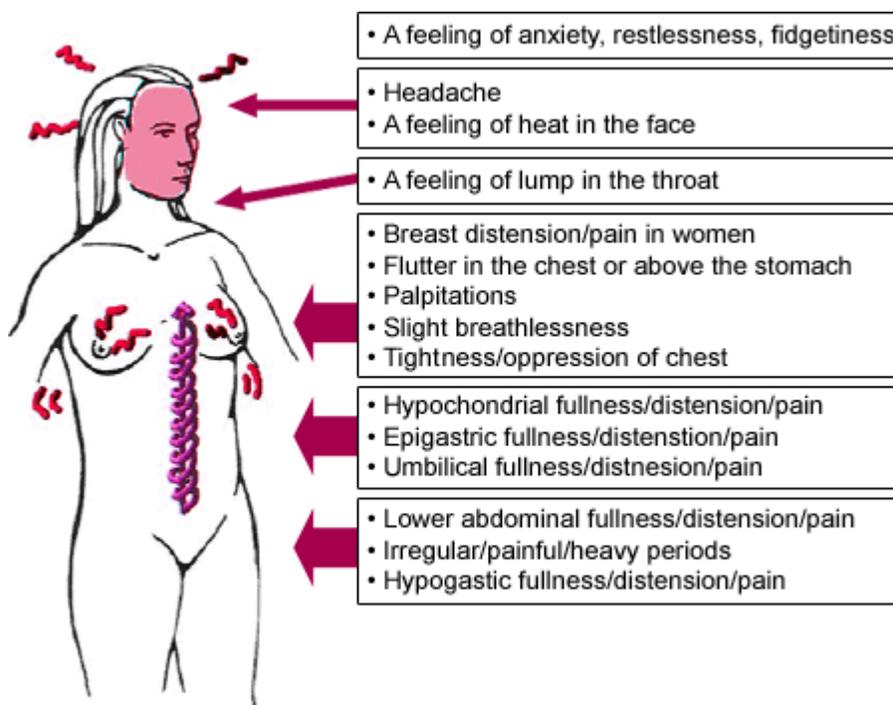
"Internal urgency" indicates a feeling of anxiety and restlessness: in severe cases, there may be panic attacks with palpitations. On a physical level, it may also be interpreted as an uncomfortable, tight sensation from the lower abdomen radiating upwards towards the heart.

Palpitations is frequently associated with the anxiety or panic attacks deriving from rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel because this vessel flows through the heart. This type of anxiety or panic attack may also be accompanied by a throbbing abdominal sensation which is also due to rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel in the abdomen. From this point of view, Rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel

could be considered as a form of "Panic Throbbing" (Zheng Chong).

Rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel causes various symptoms at different levels of the abdomen and chest. It causes primarily fullness, distension or pain in these areas. By plotting the pathway of the Penetrating Vessel, we can list the possible symptoms of rebellious Qi of the Penetrating Vessel starting from the bottom:

- Cold feet
- Fullness/distension/pain of the lower abdomen
- Hypogastric fullness/distension/pain
- Painful periods, irregular periods
- Fullness/distension/pain of the umbilical area
- Fullness/distension/pain of the epigastrium
- Feeling of tightness below the xyphoid process
- Feeling of tightness of the chest
- Palpitations
- Feeling of distension of the breasts in women
- Slight breathlessness
- Sighing
- Feeling of lump in the throat
- Feeling of heat of the face
- Headache
- Anxiety, mental restlessness, "internal urgency" (li ji). See diagram below.



c) "Palpitations" In Chinese Diagnosis

On the subject of "palpitations", it is worth explaining what this term indicates. If we ask most Western patients whether they have "palpitations", most of them will reply in the negative because they think that by "palpitations" we mean "tachycardia", i.e. a rapid beat of the heart. In reality, "palpitations" denotes simply an uncomfortable, subjective sensation of the heart beating in the chest: it has nothing to do with the speed or rate of the heart.

Therefore, when I want to ask a Western patient about this symptom, I do not ask "Do you get

palpitations?" but ask instead "Are you sometimes aware of your heart beating in an uncomfortable way?" If we ask in this manner, we will see that palpitations is a more common symptom than we think.

3. DIFFERENTIATION AND TREATMENT

a) Heart And Gall-Bladder Deficiency

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, timidity, easily frightened, lack of self-assertion, easily discouraged, cannot sit or lie down, insomnia, waking up early in the morning.

Tongue: Pale.

Pulse: Weak.

Mental-emotional profile

This person is timid, shy and lacking in drive. He or she is easily discouraged and finds it difficult to make decisions. The anxiety is mild.

Treatment principle

Tonify the Heart and Gall-Bladder, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture

Points

HE-7 Shenmen, HE-5 Tongli, BL-15 Xinshu, Ren-14 Juque, G.B.-40 Qiuxu, ST-36 Zusanli.

ii. Herbal therapy

Prescription

AN SHEN DING ZHI WAN

Calming the Mind and settling the Spirit Pill Variation

Prescription

PING BU ZHEN XIN DAN Variation

Calming and Tonifying the Heart Pill Variation.

Prescription

WU WEI ZI TANG Variation

Schisandra Decoction Variation.

Three Treasures remedy

Breaking Clouds

Breaking Clouds tonifies and lifts Qi and strengthens the Heart and Gall-Bladder.

b) Heart-Blood Deficiency

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, dizziness, pale face, insomnia, poor memory, tiredness.

Tongue: Pale and Thin.

Pulse: Choppy or Fine.

Mental-emotional profile

This person is most likely to be a woman, pale, depressed and anxious. The anxiety is mild and she hides it well.

Treatment principle
Nourish Heart-Blood, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture
Points

HE-7 Shenmen, Ren-14 Jueque, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-6 Sanyinjiao.

ii. Herbal therapy
Prescription

GUI PI TANG Variation
Tonifying the Spleen Decoction Variation

Three Treasures remedy
Calm the Shen

Calm the Shen is a variation of Gui Pi Tang and it nourishes Heart-Blood and calms the Mind.

c) Kidney- And Heart-Yin Deficiency With Empty Heat

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety that is worse in the evening, mental restlessness, insomnia, night-sweating, feeling of heat in the evening, five-palm heat, dizziness, tinnitus.

Tongue: Red without coating

Pulse: Floating-Empty and Rapid.

Mental-emotional profile

This person is more likely to be middle-aged. The anxiety is marked and is experienced more in the evenings. In women, this type of anxiety is markedly aggravated with the onset of the menopause.

There is a characteristic restlessness and fidgetiness.

Treatment principle

Nourish Heart- and Kidney-Yin, clear Empty Heat, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture
Points

HE-7 Shenmen, Ren-14 Jueque, KI-3 Taixi, Ren-4 Guanyuan, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, HE-6 Yinxi, KI-7 Fuli.

ii. Herbal therapy
Prescription

TIAN WANG BU XIN DAN
Heavenly Emperor Tonifying the Heart Pill

Three Treasures remedy

Heavenly Empress (Women's Treasure)

Heavenly Empress nourishes Heart- and Kidney-Yin, clears Empty Heat and calms the Mind. Please note that although this remedy is part of the Women's Treasure range, it is equally suitable for men as it is a variation of Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan Heavenly Emperor Tonifying the Heart Pill.

d) Lung- And Heart-Qi Deficiency

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, timidity, easily frightened, sadness, tendency to crying, weak voice, slight breathlessness, propensity to catching colds.

Tongue: Pale.

Pulse: Weak on both Front positions.

Mental-emotional profile

This person is anxious but also sad. They are often affected by grief following a loss. They will tend to be pale and speak with a weak voice. The anxiety is experienced in the chest.

Treatment principle

Tonify Heart- and Lung-Qi, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture

Points

HE-5 Tongli, HE-7 Shenmen, BL-15 Xinshu, Ren-14 Jique, LU-9 Taiyuan, LU-7 Lieque, BL-13 Feishu, Du-12 Shenzhu, Ren-12 Zhongwan, Ren-6 Qihai, ST-36 Zusanli.

ii. Herbal therapy

Prescription

YANG XIN TANG

Nourishing the Heart Decoction

Prescription

BU FEI TANG Variation

Tonifying the Lungs Decoction Variation.

e) Lung- And Heart-Qi Stagnation

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, a feeling of distension or oppression of the chest, depression, a slight feeling of a lump in the throat, slight shortness of breath, sighing, sadness, chest and upper epigastric distension, slightly purple lips, pale complexion.

Tongue: slightly Pale-Purple on the sides in the chest area.

Pulse: Empty but very slightly Overflowing on both Front positions.

Mental-emotional profile

This person is anxious but also worried and sad. They will tend to be pale and speak with a weak voice. The anxiety is experienced in the chest.

Treatment principle

Move Qi in the Heart and Lung, relax the chest, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture

Points

HE-5 Tongli, HE-7 Shenmen, P-6 Neiguan, Ren-15 Jiuwei, Ren-17 Shanzhong, LU-7 Lieque, ST-40 Fenglong.

ii. Herbal therapy

Prescription

BAN XIA HOU PO TANG

Pinellia-Magnolia Decoction.

Three Treasures remedy

Open the Heart

Open the Heart moves Qi of the Heart and Lungs and calms the Mind. It has a special action on the chest and it is therefore particularly indicated when there are chest symptoms such as a feeling of tightness or oppression of the chest.

f) Heart-Blood Stasis

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, insomnia, agitation, poor memory, chest pain.

Tongue: Purple on the sides (chest area).

Pulse: Wiry, Choppy or Firm.

Mental-emotional profile

This person will tend to be middle-aged. The anxiety is experienced more in the evening and often also in the middle of the night, when they might wake up with a panicky feeling.

Treatment principle

Invigorate Heart-Blood, eliminate stasis, calm the Mind.

i. Acupuncture

Points

HE-5 Tongli, P-6 Neiguan, Ren-14 Jique, Ren-15 Jiuwei, LIV-3 Taichong, SP-6 Sanyinjiao.

ii. Herbal therapy

Prescription

TAO REN HONG HUA JIAN

Persica-Carthamus Decoction

Three Treasures remedy

Red Stirring

Red Stirring invigorates Heart-Blood. It can be used to invigorate Blood in the Heart but it does not have a pronounced calming the Mind effect. This should therefore be integrated with acupuncture.

g) Phlegm-Heat Harassing The Heart

Clinical manifestations

Palpitations, anxiety, insomnia, dreaming a lot, feeling of oppression of the chest, sputum in the throat, slightly Amanic@ behaviour.

Tongue: Red, Swollen with sticky-yellow coating.

Pulse: Slippery-Rapid.

Mental-emotional profile

In this case, the anxiety is marked, to the point of agitation. The person may be hyperactive and slightly chaotic.

Treatment principle

Resolve Phlegm, clear Heart-Heat, calm the Mind, open the Mind's orifices.

i. Acupuncture

Points

P-5 Jianshi, HE-8 Shaofu, Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-40 Fenglong, ST-8 Touwei, G.B.-13 Benshen, Ren-15 Jiuwei, Du-24 Shenting.

ii. Herbal therapy

Prescription

WEN DAN TANG

Warming the Gall-Bladder Decoction

Prescription
GUI SHEN TANG
Restoring the Mind Decoction

Three Treasures remedy
Clear the Soul

Clear the Soul clears Heat and resolves Phlegm from the Heart and Lungs and calms the Mind.

Settling the Soul

Settling the Soul clears Heat and resolves Phlegm from the Heart and Liver, calms the Mind and settles the Ethereal Soul.

4. CASE HISTORIES

Case history

A 42-year-old woman had been suffering from anxiety ever since the birth of her second child 5 years previously. Her anxiety was mild but constant and disabling. She had a vague feeling of anxiety without being able to pin-point the cause or the object of it. She also slept badly. Her health was otherwise good apart from complaining of palpitations, blurred vision and tingling of the limbs. Her tongue was Pale and her pulse Choppy.

Diagnosis

This is a very clear example of anxiety deriving from Heart-Blood deficiency as evidenced by the anxiety, insomnia and palpitations. There was some Liver-Blood deficiency as evidenced by the blurred vision and tingling. Her tongue and pulse confirm the Blood deficiency.

In her case, the Blood deficiency arose after the birth of her second child: this is a common cause of Blood deficiency in women and one that may also give rise to post-natal depression.

Treatment

I treated this patient primarily with acupuncture and with a herbal remedy. The points I used were selected from the following:

- Ren-4 Guanyuan, ST-36 Zusanli, LIV-8 Ququan and SP-6 Sanyinjiao to nourish Liver-Blood.
- HE-7 Shenmen to nourish Heart-Blood.
- Du-24 Shenting and Ren-15 Jiuwei to calm the Mind.

In addition to acupuncture, I used the Three Treasures remedy Calm the Shen which nourishes Liver- and Heart-Blood and calms the Mind.

I treated her for 9 months after which her anxiety was completely relieved.

Case history

A 50-year-old woman had been suffering with anxiety for a long time. She experienced her anxiety more in the daytime and her sleep was good. She worried very easily about the smallest things.

She was rather overweight and felt cold easily. She suffered from lower backache and dizziness and her urination was frequent and her urine pale.

I enquired about her working life and she had been overworking for many years, leaving home early in

the morning and returning in the evening. Her tongue was Pale and her pulse was Weak and Deep, particularly on both Rear positions.

Diagnosis

In this case, the anxiety derives clearly from a deficiency of the Kidneys and specifically Kidney-Yang. Fear is the emotion pertaining to the Kidneys.

Treatment

I treated this patient with a combination of acupuncture and a herbal remedy. The acupuncture points I used were selected from the following.

- Ren-4 Guanyuan with moxa, BL-23 Shenshu, KI-7 Fuliu, KI-3 Taixi to tonify Kidney-Yang.
- Du-24 Shenting and Ren-15 Jiuwei to calm the Mind.

I also used the Three Treasures remedy Strengthen the Root which is a variation of You Gui Wan Restoring the Right (Kidney) Pill to tonify Kidney-Yang.

END NOTES

1. Classic of Difficulties, p. 73-4.