Acupuncture and Moxibustion
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Migraine Headache, Brain Chemistry & the "Matrix" Point Formula

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Recent Western medical research on migraine headaches suggests that one co-factor producing these vascular events may be improper serotonin metabolism.1 Since it is also well documented that acupuncture has a powerful impact on brain chemistry as well as a variety of neurologic functions,2 it may be that one of the reasons for the effectiveness of acupuncture therapy on this type of pain is its impact on brain chemistry.

In issue #9, 2003 of Gan Su Zhong Yi (Gansu Chinese Medicine), Du Xiuxing published an article titled, "Experiences in the Treatment of 40 Cases of Side Head Pain with Matrix Acupuncture-moxibustion." This article appeared on pages 27-28 of that journal. Because migraines are such a common complaint and because this acupoint formula is largely unknown in the West, a summary of its main clinical points is given below. While the doctor who did this research does not discuss the impact of his treatment on brain chemistry, it is this writer's belief that one of the reasons that acupuncture is so effective in the treatment of a variety of types of pain is exactly that. This is especially true when certain points, known to be effective in a wide variety of conditions, are selected. In this treatment protocol, those points include He Gu (LI 4), Nei Guan (Per 6), and Feng Chi (GB 20).

Cohort description
Among the 40 patients included in this study, there were 12 males and 28 females, 16-68 years of age, who had suffered from migraines for from one month to 23 years.

Treatment method
The Matrix point formula consists of: Si Zhong Xue (Four Middles Points; these are four extra-channel points located one inch further outside Si Shen Cong, M-HN-1 on the crown of the head), Tou Nie Xue (Head Temple Point, an extra-channel point located one inch posterior to Tai Yang, M-HN-9, on the same level as the apex of the ear), and Feng Chi (GB 20). This group of eight points (when needled bilaterally) makes up the head region Matrix point formula. If the headache is most pronounced in the forehead or eye region, these points are combined with Ben Shen (GB 13) and Zan Zhu (Bl 2). If the headache is vascular in nature, they are combined with Nei Guan (Per 6), while, if they are neurological in nature, they are combined with He Gu (LI 4).3 (It is believed by some Chinese doctors, that these last two points, Nei Guan and He Gu, have a powerful impact on the subconscious, autonomic nervous system, and brain chemistry functions.)

A 1-1.5 inch 28-30 gauge needle was used to needle the first four points with their tips angled toward Bai Hui (GV 20). These points were needled transversely to a depth of one inch. Feng Chi was needled toward the opposite eye to a depth of one inch, while Tou Nie was needled transversely toward Shang Guan (GB 3) to a depth of one inch. After obtaining the qi, the needles were retained for 20-30 minutes. If Zan Zhu was needed, it was inserted with its tip angled upward. If Ben Shen was needed, its tip was angled posterior. If Nei Guan and/or He Gu were needed, they were used with a draining technique. Acupuncture was administered one per day, with 10 times equaling one course of treatment.

Treatment outcomes
Cure was defined as complete disappearance of headaches after 1-2 courses of treatment and no recurrence within one year. Marked effect was defined as less than five headaches of slight degree within the year after treatment. Patients did not need to take any medicine for these headaches which remitted spontaneously. No effect meant that, although the headaches decreased in severity after treatment, their incidence was decreased by less than 50%. Based on these criteria, 31 out of 40 cases (77.5%) were labeled cured, seven (17.5%) got a marked effect, and two (5%) got no effect, for a total effectiveness rate of 95%.

Discussion
According to Dr. Du, migraines are due to spasm of the cerebral arteries causing lack of blood and disturbance in function. While he does not discuss the causes of this functional disturbance, it is this writer's opinion that brain chemistry is, indeed, one of the causative factors in this disease process. Dr. Du chose these Matrix points based on the saying, "Choose points based on location [of the disease]." The Matrix points regulate both the central nervous system and blood vessels in the top and sides of the head. They appear to have a definite effect in the treatment of migraines. However, it should be noted that the treatment frequency and needle technique may have a lot to do with these outcomes and not just the choice of points. It is also the writer/translator's opinion that especially the addition of He Gu and Nei Guan to this protocol increase the effectiveness of such treatments because of their known impact on brain chemistry and general neurological function.

For more information on the treatment of migraine headaches with Chinese medicine, see Bob Flaws and Philippe Sionneau's The Treatment of Modern Western Medical Diseases with Chinese Medicine available from Blue Poppy Press.

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5. NIH Consensus Statement on Acupuncture, Office of the Director of the National Institutes of Health, Volume 15, No 5, November 5, 1997, pp. 11-12