



Neck Pain

Neck pain can be caused by factors such as muscular strain, nerve impingement or poor posture. This newsletter will focus on the condition torticollis, or more commonly known as, *wry neck*. Wry neck involves a severe muscle spasm, usually to one side of the neck. It can be caused by either an acute muscle strain, due to a sharp neck movement, or irritated chronic scar tissue caused by an old injury.

It is a very painful condition. People with wry neck find it difficult to find a comfortable position; even when lying down. Pain may be felt in the neck or down the arms. If there is also a “pins and needle” like sensation, it can indicate that there is some nerve impingement or disc trauma in the lower neck or upper back.

A Chinese medicine take

Chinese medicine takes into account any soft tissue scars or injuries when treating a neck complaint and also “internal” aspects for diagnosis. There are specific acupuncture points on the neck and shoulders which are called the *wind gate* points. These points represent an entry point to muscles and joints where a cold chill can travel. If you are out in the wind and cold and perhaps run down, wind can travel into the muscle layer. This will result in sharp neck pain and restricted movement and also common cold symptoms such as: chills, headache and a runny nose. If someone is prone to wry neck attacks, exposing their necks to the wind and cold will increase the chances of pain and spasm.

Treatment

Massage and acupuncture will significantly reduce neck pain and spasm. As mentioned earlier, there are specific acupuncture points which will instantaneously improve mobility in the neck. Usually more than one acupuncture treatment will be needed to resolve any severe spasms.

A treatment of prescribed Chinese herbs can also help harmonise the body if the cause of the condition is internal and the result of a wind chill.

Home remedies

Applying liniment and heat will also soften the muscle spasm. I use Chinese medicine liniments in my clinic such as *zen*, *kwan loong* and *po sum oil*. In addition, herbal plasters which you stick onto sore spots are very helpful for reducing pain. All of these products are available for purchase.

Applying pressure with your thumbs over the top of the shoulders, near the base of the neck, will help relieve tension and spasm. Avoid the neck itself, as pressing it can often cause more spasm. For a quick and easy home herbal infusion to treat the wind cold and help the release the neck try this:

Add some slices of ginger and the white part of spring onion to some boiling water, bring to the boil then simmer for a few minutes, add a little brown sugar, drain and drink.

Neck no no's

- Sleeping on the tummy with your head turned, especially if your head is on a pillow.
- Facing a computer at work on an angle so your head is turned.
- Speaking with the phone on your shoulder and tipping your head towards the phone.
- Going to bed or outside with wet hair after a shower or exercise.
- Going outside on a cold day with your neck exposed – wear a scarf!
- Over physical training when the neck is sensitive. Treatment here is crucial to avoid more spasm and sensitivities.
- Falling asleep on the