

Joint Reinforcing-Reducing Effect of Acupuncture, Moxibustion and Cupping Therapies

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Based on experience in selecting points and performing manipulation according to syndromes for more than 30 years of clinical practice, the author has summarized a simple, effective and practicable method to achieve the joint reinforcing-reducing effect of acupuncture, moxibustion and cupping therapies.

It is important to diagnose and treat diseases according to differentiation of syndromes in acupuncture as well as in TCM medication. Principle, method, recipe and drugs in TCM medication are manifested in prescriptions, while principle, method, recipe, points and manipulation in acupuncture are manifested in selecting points and performing manipulation with the latter as an important link for acupuncture to produce effect. Acupuncturists usually use traditional method to achieve reinforcing-reducing effect. So far, there has been no objective technique to standardize reinforcing-reducing manipulations, no unified standard of manipulation and examination techniques, making it difficult for acupuncturists to grasp manipulation. According to different reinforcing-reducing effects of acupuncture, moxibustion and cupping, the author has summarized a simple method of using the three methods jointly to obtain good reinforcing-reducing effect.

1. Reinforcing-reducing effect achieved by simple acupuncture with filiform needle, moxibustion or cupping therapy

Since the joint use of acupuncture with filiform needle, moxibustion and cupping is based on their different and single effects when used separately, only by understanding whether each of them has reinforcing or reducing effect, can they be jointly used in an effective way.

1.1 Uniform reinforcing-reducing method of acupuncture with filiform needle

Points are selected according to illness condition and along the related channels. Points with excess-purging effect should be selected to treat excess syndromes, and points with the effect of strengthening body resistance should be selected to treat deficiency syndromes. Acupuncture can regulate *qi* and blood of the affected organs and channels. Acupuncture should be performed with moderate stimulation and uniform reinforcing-reducing method until the attainment of needling sensation in the patient. The needle is usually retained for 20–30 min to regulate channels, collaterals, *qi* and blood. More points should be selected for excess syndromes and less points for deficiency syndromes.

1.2 Reinforcing effect of moxibustion

Moxibustion also has reinforcing or reducing effect. The author mainly uses moxibustion with warming needle, moxibustion with moxa-box and mild moxibustion to treat deficiency syndrome. These methods are applied for strengthening the body resistance. When moxibustion therapy is combined with acupoints for tonification, Back-*shu* points or specific points, it can strengthen the body, regulate the functions of the internal organs, and supplement the relevant basic substances of the body. For instance, moxibustion at Back-*shu* points can regulate

functions of internal organs, at Geshu (BL 17) supplement blood, Xuanzhong (GB 39) nourish marrow, Shenshu (BL 23) reinforce kidney *yang* and kidney *qi*, and Shenque (CV 8) replenish primary *qi*. In combination with acupuncture, moxibustion is usually practiced for 20–30 min. Moxibustion with reinforcing effect is mainly used for deficiency of *qi*, *yang* and blood rather than *yin* deficiency.

1.3 Reducing effect of cupping

Cupping, a common method in clinical practice, is mainly used for purging pathogen, such as removing blood stasis by promoting blood circulation, expelling wind and dampness, purging heat and toxin, activating collaterals and stopping pain. The author has also used cupping and achieved good reducing effect. Fire-insertion cupping or flash-fire cupping is generally used. Slide-cupping can be also used according to illness condition. For mild pathogen, the cup is retained for 5–10 min. For worse pathogen, flashing cupping is performed for 1–2 min followed by retained cup for 10–15 min. For severe pathogen, flashing cupping is practiced for 3–5 min followed by retained cup for 10–20 min. Cupping can eliminate both endogenous and exogenous pathogen, which produces quicker effect to remove superficial pathogen rather than deep pathogen. It is worth noting that cupping can be used to treat patients with whatever pathogens. However, it is inappropriate for patients with simple deficiency syndrome to be treated with cupping, or their illness condition will be aggravated. Especially, cupping should not be used to treat patients with severe deficiency of vital *qi*, such as those with heart failure.

2. Joint reinforcing-reducing effect of acupuncture, moxibustion and cupping therapies

2.1 On excess syndrome

Acupuncture and cupping are often jointly used to strengthen pathogen-expelling effect on patients with simple excess syndrome. For example, for treating externally contracted cough with excessiveness of the pathogenic *qi* and without insufficiency of the normal *qi*, in addition to acupuncture for purging pathogen,

flashing cupping is carried out at Xuanji (CV 21), Zhongfu (LU 1), Kufang (ST 14), Dazhui (GV 14) and Feishu (BL 13) with the cups retained for 15 min to remove the pathogenic factors and stop cough and assist the therapeutic result of acupuncture in dispelling pathogenic factors. For another example, when treating headache due to up-flaming of liver fire, apart from acupuncture at corresponding points, cupping is performed at Qimen (LR 14) and Ganshu (BL 18) to strengthen the effect of clearing away liver-fire. In general, this method produces quick effect on patients with excess syndrome.

2.2 On deficiency syndrome

Stress should be put on using mild moxibustion or moxibustion with moxa-box or warming needle techniques to strengthen body resistance of patients with deficiency syndrome. Apart from selecting different methods of moxibustion, it is also very important to select acupoints, such as Shenque (CV 8), Guanyuan (CV 4), Qihai (CV 6), Dazhui (GV 14), Zusanli (ST 36) and Yongquan (KI 1) for tonifying and strengthening the body. Moxibustion is practiced for 10–15 min to treat mild deficiency, for 20–30 min to treat worse syndrome of deficiency, and for 30–40 min to treat severe syndrome of deficiency, making heat produced by moxibustion gradually penetrate and exert the effect.

2.3 On deficiency complicated with excess

The most commonly seen syndromes in acupuncture clinical practice are those of deficiency complicated with excess because many of the patients have chronic refractory diseases and fail to be treated in which their normal *qi* has been injured while pathogens have not been eliminated. Only by treating both the excess and deficient, can the therapeutic effect be achieved. The author believes that it is difficult to accurately judge the extent of deficiency and excess and precisely grasp suitable dosage of reinforcement and reduction. Patients with excessiveness of pathogenic *qi* as primary cause and insufficiency of the normal *qi* as secondary cause should be treated with acupuncture and cupping as a main method to purge excess and moxibustion as an auxiliary method to strengthen body resistance. When

excessiveness of pathogenic *qi* is equivalent to insufficiency of the normal *qi*, acupuncture and cupping should also be equivalent to moxibustion. When insufficiency of the normal *qi* is worse than excessiveness of pathogenic *qi*, moxibustion is used as a main method and acupuncture with or without cupping as an auxiliary method. Less acupuncture, more moxibustion and no cupping are used to treat patients with insufficiency of the normal *qi* and without excessiveness of pathogenic *qi*. More acupuncture, more cupping and no moxibustion are used to treat patients with excessiveness of pathogenic *qi* and without insufficiency of the normal *qi*.

3. Timely regulating reinforcing-reducing method of acupuncture and moxibustion

The advantage of acupuncture and moxibustion lies in the fact that physicians can regulate therapeutic program in time during treatment.

3.1 Adjusting manipulation according to false phenomena

Because some illness condition is covered by false phenomena, physicians may make wrong diagnosis. It is very difficult to change the recipe of medication once prescribed. However, according to the feedback from patients in treatment with acupuncture and moxibustion, physicians can judge if the diagnosis and treatment are correct and adjust manipulation if necessary.

Patients uneasily getting needle sensation during

acupuncture mainly suffer from insufficiency of the normal *qi*. It is necessary for them to be treated with moxibustion. Purplish red cupping-mark means severe damp-heat. Red cupping-mark means severe heat. Bluish purple cupping-mark means severe cold-dampness. Cupping-mark with dark color means exuberance of the pathogenic *qi*. Cupping-mark with light color means mild pathogenic *qi*. No cupping-mark means the absence of pathogenic *qi*, when it is inappropriate to use cupping method.

3.2 Adjusting manipulation according to change in illness condition

Because patients' syndromes can change after treatment, manipulation should be adjusted in time according to illness condition. For example, after acupuncture and cupping, when damp-heat has been reduced, the frequency of cupping should be decreased. If damp-heat has been completely removed, cupping should be stopped. After heavy moxibustion, when *yang-qi* has been gradually restored, the frequency of moxibustion should be decreased. If *yang-qi* has been completely restored, moxibustion should be stopped. The whole process of treatment is based on the TCM principle of treatment of diseases according to differentiation of syndromes. The above mentioned is the author's personal experience in practice. The methods are simple, practicable, and offered for reference.

(Translated by DUAN Shu-min 段树民)