

Acupuncture for Weight Loss

by Joey Komada

Acupuncture for Weight Loss How to Lose the Weight and Keep It Off with Oriental Medicine

Weight loss comes under the topic of "Weight Control", because we are concerned with the loss and MAINTENANCE of loss of weight. This is a multi-faceted problem, and a good program involves diet, exercise and stress reduction techniques. Chinese acupressure and digestive aid exercises are also useful tools in the battle with weight loss.

Acupuncture is an ADJUNCT therapy. It is not a panacea or a wonder cure in the treatment of weight control. But, acupuncture is effective in making it easier to lose and maintain that loss if the patient is willing to change their lifestyle. The exact mechanism by which acupuncture works is unknown but we know that acupuncture needles inserted into specific points on the body and in the ear release endorphins which have a calming and relaxing effect that makes it easier to deal with stress, frustration and anxiety that can trigger overeating and bingeing on fattening foods. Also endorphins affect the digestive and hormonal systems so acupuncture can help rebalance the organ systems that are running too fast- or in this case too slow—i.e., the metabolism and the will power.

The Acupuncture Treatment

In order for the acupuncturist to choose the correct points for you, you must first come in for a consultation to discuss your particular pattern of overeating, and let the practitioner know in your intake form if there are any real digestive difficulties. Then the acupuncturist would check your pulse to discern the general state of your energy and measure the health of your stomach energy in particular, and then they would look at your tongue to check for cracks, peeling or puffiness on the stomach area, or a suspicious yellow or thick white coating that might indicate troublesome heat or coldness in the stomach and would provide some clues as to why the person was gaining weight.

The Acupuncture Points

Then, armed with this information, the acupuncturist would devise a treatment protocol using a combination of ear and body points. Although the Chinese developed the system of ear acupuncture a long time ago, as one of the various Microsystems of the body containing all the points relating to the major organs and body parts, a Frenchman by the name of Nogier, discovered many more points on the ear that pertain to Western medicine such as points called "Adrenal", "Pituitary", FSH, "Ovary", "Thyroid", etc.

Many of the points from both systems that are important for weight loss treatments are:

Mouth - for the impulsive eater who may also smoke a lot and talk a lot

Stomach - for the person who eats even after they're full or who's constantly nibbling

Hungry - for general appetite control

Lung - for food addicts, and people who love chocolate, sweets

Shenmen - a calming point, for the psychology overlay for anxiety, anger, frustration, insecurity

Endocrine - for water retention that's responsible for some of the weight gain

Adrenal and Ovary - if weight gain is due to menopause or P.M.S.

Spleen - for sugar imbalances and hormonal disturbances

Kidney - for water retention, and nervous system and hormonal imbalances
Thyroid - for slow metabolism

The practitioner chooses two or more of these points for each treatment depending upon the patient's problem and personality profile regarding overeating.

Next, body points would be selected.

During the first few treatments, most likely the "Four Gate" points (LI 4, Liver3) would be used to circulate the energy throughout the body and calm the nervous system. Ren 12, the front collecting point of the stomach energy would be chosen for many treatments, as would Stomach 36, three inches distal to the eye of the knee that tonifies the energy and helps circulate oxygen and blood of the whole body and of the stomach in particular. Then, based on the diagnosis, the practitioner may add Stomach, 40, the master point for mucous, or Kidney 7 or 10 for edema or water retention.

The acupuncturist may use electro stimulation on some of these points to increase the endorphin release and stimulate the metabolism. The needles would be kept in place for around thirty to forty-five minutes depending on how much support was needed for the patient, and after the needles are removed, ear tacs with adhesive on them are often placed in the same spots on the ear to continue the stimulation between treatments. The way it works is this: when the patient feels an urge to eat, s/he applies mild pressure to the point or rubs it back and forth for about 20 seconds. This type of acupressure stimulates the point, causes a mild endorphin release, relaxes the patient and helps them to regain their willpower or resolve about resisting the temptation to eat. The patient removes the tacs at home after three days and throws them away or takes them out sooner if there is any irritation or discomfort. It is a good idea to also remove oneself from the location, person or food that triggers the resistance to the diet or contributes to the breakdown of willpower. For example, one might want to stay away from the kitchen and refrigerator between meals.

The Treatment Plan

The number of acupuncture treatments necessary depends on the patient's goals for losing weight, the speed at which they want to lose, and their commitment to keeping the weight off. If the overeating is severe, a treatment every day for the first five days is appropriate and can then taper off the second week to every other day and the third week to every three days. For the average patient who wants to lose between five to ten pounds, one treatment every three days or twice a week until they reach their goal is appropriate, and then a booster treatment once every two weeks is optimal. After a few booster treatments, the patient and practitioner will mutually decide when to terminate frequent treatments and then can aim to meet approximately four times a year at the change of seasons when energy levels are unstable and tonification and harmonizing of one's system is appropriate for everyone.

Nutritional Counseling and Lifestyle Changes

As was mentioned earlier, a good weight loss program includes nutritional counseling and exercise as well as a commitment to make permanent lifestyle changes. The acupuncturist can help with nutritional counseling and can discuss a diet regimen that the patient can live with and maintain for the long term. A diet that is high in fiber and low in fat, with moderate amounts of low-density carbohydrates and low-fat protein is usually the best choice to adopt. With this type of a diet program, the patient can avoid the pit-falls of yo-yo dieting or the tendency to lose weight and then regain it.

Other important tools that can aid in weight loss are stress reduction techniques and a moderate exercise regimen. The acupuncturist can suggest various stress reduction methods that may

include breathing exercises, Tai Chi, yoga, meditation or biofeedback. And since the goal of a weight program is not only weight loss but the maintenance of that loss, an exercise program that the patient likes is the best one to choose. The patient could try starting a program that includes brisk walking three times a week for forty minutes. After a few weeks when stamina is increased, they could try walking five times a week. After that more aerobic exercise can be added such as the treadmill, stair climber or aerobics classes, cycling or whatever form of rigorous exercise the person enjoys and can maintain for the long term. It is a good idea to use free weights beginning with three pound weights and practicing just two to three sets of arm curls three times a week. Moderate weight training builds lean body mass and helps to reduce body fat as well as strengthen and build bone mass and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

Herbal Medicine and Supplements

Next a good individualized nutritional supplement program is important because everyone has a different metabolism and different needs for nutrients. It will include vitamins, minerals, herbs antioxidants, phytochemicals and nutraceuticals. These will support the diet program and balance the blood sugar to help give the body the strength, energy and defense it needs to maintain the healthy life style that s/he has begun.

Many diet and appetite suppression products are available on the market and surprisingly there is a very effective and safe ancient Chinese formula for digestion that comes in a pleasant tasting chewable wafer form called BAO HE WAN. The ingredients are:

Shan Zha (Fructus Crataegi) --promotes digestion of meat and fats; dissolves food accumulation

Shen Qu (Medicated Leaven) -- digests alcohol, rice and vinegar and dissolves food accumulation

Lai Fu Zi (Semen Raphani) -- digests starch (wheat and breads)

Ban Xia (Pinellia), Chen Pi (Tangerine Peel), and Fu Ling (Poria Cocos), -- resolve dampness and food accumulations

Lian Qiao (Fructus Forsythiae) -- clears stomach heat that may result from accumulated food that dries up the digestive liquids

When this famous herbal formula is drunk as a tea, other herbs may be added if there is gas or abdominal distension such as cardamon or magnolia bark. Or if constipation is a problem a gentle laxative like Semen Pruni or Huo Ma Ren may be used. However an important concept of Chinese medicine is to diagnose properly and treat the patient with the correct herbs so as not to consume body fluids or disturb electrolyte balance. Food accumulation may be due to stomach deficiency so the practitioner may add other herbs such as Codonopsis to tonify the stomach energy so the food could descend properly through the digestive tract.

Breathing and Abdominal Exercises

While the patient is undergoing the behavior modification program and is successfully losing weight, it is a good idea to incorporate a set of deep breathing and abdominal exercises that utilize the acupuncture meridians or energy lines on the body to stimulate relaxation and digestion. If we practice deep abdominal breathing while lying down for a few minutes in the morning before we arise, we will not only take in more oxygen but will stimulate the stomach, spleen, kidney, and reproductive energy lines that are all located on the center of the torso. Digestion will be improved and all those organs will function more effectively. We will also start the day with more energy and clarity.

Another method of stimulating these same organs in the stomach region is the abdominal finger pressure massage that follows the direction of the large intestines. This massage may also be performed in bed in the morning and evening and will gently stimulate all the points on the central

torso and will not only encourage proper digestion but will foster homeostasis or the harmonious balancing of the hormone and endocrine systems of the body.

Pressure Points

Last but not least, three pressure points on the body may be stimulated daily for two minutes each that will promote the general health as well as aid digestion, elimination and relaxation. These points are: Large Intestines 4 (HEGU); Pericardium 6 (Neiguan); and Stomach 36 (Zusanli). The points should be pressed with strong continuous pressure for approximately two minutes each and may be said to comprise a self-healing treatment.

While no guarantee may be given for acupuncture treatments for weight loss, the self-motivated patient who will take the time to practice most of the things outlined here will most likely be pleased with the results that s/he finds within a reasonable amount of time.

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Acupuncture and Oriental medicine is an art and a science that takes years to master. Look for an acupuncturist with experience in the treatment of weight loss/management.

About the Author

Joey Komada is a California licensed acupuncturist and herbalist and is nationally recognized as a board-certified Diplomat in acupuncture by the NCCAOM. She received her Bachelor's degree from Boston University in cultural anthropology and her Masters Degree in Oriental Medicine from Emperor's College in Santa Monica. Before beginning private practice in Torrance, California, in 1993, Joey completed a post-graduate internship in Acupuncture and Herbology in Beijing, China at the World Health Organization designated center for Traditional Medicine.

Joey began her career in Oriental medicine as a patient. When she suffered a complication during her second pregnancy in Japan, her gynecologist recommended Chinese herbs to rectify the problem. The Eastern remedy not only helped, it inspired her to make a mid-life career change from teaching. Her decision to go into medicine was not entirely unexpected, however, as her father was a Family Practice M.D. and her mother a Registered Nurse. She has practiced alongside medical doctors since the inception of her practice, and believes that Oriental and Western medicine complement each other and that patients can receive treatment from both simultaneously without adverse effects.

Joey lived abroad for fourteen years in Japan and the Middle East before coming to Los Angeles, and feels that this experience prepared her to embrace non-Western methods of healing as well as encourage a holistic understanding of the influences of body, mind, spirit, environment and tradition on one's health.