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## Keep Your Skin Healthy with Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be very effective at treating skin conditions. Treatments can provide quick relief for acute symptoms, as well as significant and lasting relief from recurrent or chronic skin conditions.

The skin reflects and reacts to imbalances within the body's internal landscape and the effects of the environment. Internal disharmonies caused by strong emotions, diet, and your constitution can contribute to the development of a skin disorder. Environmental influences, such as wind, dryness, dampness and heat can also trigger or exacerbate skin disorders.

To keep your skin healthy and beautiful on the outside, you must work on the inside of your body as well. Increasing the flow of energy, blood and lymph circulation improves the skin's natural healthy color. Promotion of collagen production increases muscle tone and elasticity; this helps to firm the skin. Stimulating the formation of body fluids nourishes the skin, adding moisture and making it softer, smoother and more lustrous.

General skin conditions that can be treated with acupuncture and Oriental medicine include acne, dermatitis, eczema, pruritus, psoriasis, rosacea, shingles and urticaria (hives). Evidence that acupuncture and herbal medicine have been used for skin disorders, such as hives, can be found in early medical literature dating back to 3 AD. Medicinal plants and stone needles were utilized to relieve and cure discomforts of the external areas of the body.

Oriental medicine does not recognize skin problems as one particular syndrome. Instead, it aims to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual using a variety of techniques including acupuncture, herbal medicine, bodywork, lifestyle/dietary recommendations and energetic exercises to restore imbalances found in the body. Therefore, if 10 patients are treated with Oriental medicine for eczema, each patient will receive a unique, customized treatment with different lifestyle and dietary recommendations.

Acupuncture views nutrition in a complex light, through the application of Oriental medicinal wisdom to dietary habits. In short, certain foods are considered too "yang", or hot, to eat in excess during the warmer months, while others are prized for their "yin" ability to cool the body. Overall, the goal is balance between the internal yin and yang of the body. A healthy, nutritional diet, good sleep and moderate exercise can keep your skin and physical form at its best.

### Chronic Dry Skin? Try Acupuncture!

When the superficial layer of skin becomes dehydrated due to changes in weather, allergic reaction, certain medications or bathing/showering, it may develop fine flakes and dry patches. The medical term for this condition is called xeroderma or xerosis, and it may be temporary or respond well to moisturizers. Unfortunately for some, this condition becomes chronic and causes uncomfortable symptoms that require



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## Foods to Help You Look Your Best



Be sure to integrate these items into your diet to help keep your skin look its best:

**Vitamin A:** Acting as an antioxidant to neutralize harmful elements in our skin, vitamin A helps to prevent wrinkles, resist infection and maintain the skin's elasticity. One of the best places to get vitamin A is from vegetables that are deep orange in color, such as carrots or sweet potatoes.

professional treatment. If chronic dry skin goes untreated, there is a higher risk of secondary conditions like tears in the skin that lead to infection, rashes, eczema, cellulitis or thickening and darkening patches

According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, the lung organ has important associations with any condition relating to dryness. One of its primary functions is to lubricate all the other organs, including the skin as this is the largest organ of the body. The skin plays an important role in detoxification. The lung is also known as "the delicate organ" due to its sensitivity to hot or cold temperatures.

To further demonstrate the relationship between the lung and dryness, the Neijing, a highly regarded acupuncture and Oriental medicine text, states that "the lung has a natural aversion to dryness." Not only is the lung vulnerable to dry conditions, but when affected, it can cause conditions of dryness in other areas of the body. Therefore, a practitioner may diagnose a patient exhibiting symptoms of chronic dry skin as having a lung imbalance.

## Treating Hives with Acupuncture

Hives (urticaria) are swollen and red bumps, patches or welts on the skin that appear suddenly. Itching is the most common symptom associated with hives, although some people report that hives cause a stinging or burning sensation.

Hives can occur anywhere on the body including the hands, face, lips, tongue, throat or ears. A sign that the whole body is experiencing a hypersensitivity reaction, a hives outbreak can occur due to a wide array of stimuli. While intolerance to certain foods, additives, intense emotions, sunlight exposure and medications can all cause hives; in 70-75 percent of outbreaks, the exact cause of hives remains unknown.

Whether they last for just a few minutes, a few hours or persist for several weeks, hives are rarely a medical emergency. However in some cases, they are the first sign of a strong allergic reaction to something and can be accompanied by shock or difficulty breathing, which can be life threatening. About 20 percent of people will experience hives (urticaria) at some point in their lives.

While standard treatment for acute cases of hives involves antihistamines or a corticosteroid drug to relieve symptoms, many people are turning to acupuncture and Oriental medicine to address underlying imbalances that cause this condition and help stop recurrent outbreaks.

In Oriental medicine, an outbreak of hives is described as wind invading the skin and the meridians, causing itching and swelling. When the eruptions are red, it is an indication that wind and heat are involved. When the eruptions are a pale pink or white, it is likely that the diagnosis will be wind-cold invading the skin. How the condition is diagnosed will determine what acupuncture points are used, what herbal medicines are prescribed and what lifestyle/dietary recommendations are made.

Treatments are directed at addressing both the cause and the symptoms by providing immediate relief from the itching and swelling and addressing the underlying imbalances and triggers that are causing the condition.

A study published in the Internet Journal of Dermatology examined the efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of chronic hives (urticaria). The results showed that acupuncture was able to reduce both episode rate and episode duration of urticaria by as much as 25 percent. After three weeks, the majority of the acupuncture-treated patients experienced partial remission of their symptoms. The researchers also noted that the greatest improvements were seen in the third week of treatments and that the efficacy of acupuncture seemed to increase with each treatment.

## Finding Eczema Relief

Eczema, or atopic dermatitis, is a skin disorder resulting in rough, red and itchy patches on the body. In addition, there can be a host of other symptoms and complications that can greatly vary between individuals. For some, small blisters may be present that when scratched, may bleed or ooze fluid and then crust over when dry. For others, a persistent need to scratch itchy skin may cause anxiety and sleep problems. Other

### **Blackberries, Blueberries, Strawberries and Plums:**

Antioxidants and other phytochemicals in these fruits can protect cells from damage and disintegration, thus guarding against premature aging. In a study published in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry, these four fruits weighed in with the highest "total antioxidant capacity" of any food.

### **Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs):**

Responsible for skin repair, moisture content and flexibility, and because the body cannot produce its own, EFAs must be obtained from one's diet. Fish, walnuts and flaxseed oil are great sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

**Selenium:** An antioxidant mineral responsible for tissue elasticity and healthy skin, selenium can be found in brown rice, turkey, tuna and Brazil nuts

**Green Tea:** Green tea's ability to slow down the development of some signs of aging is attributed to its high levels of polyphenols, which have been well-documented for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

**Water:** Essential to maintaining your skin's elasticity and suppleness, hydration plays a key role in keeping skin cells healthy. Hydration helps cells move nutrients in and toxins out to keep skin clean and clear.

## Troubling Acne?

While acne is a condition that affects nearly 85 percent of all adolescents, the American Dermatologist Association reports that 20 percent of adults have an active acne condition. Although some are led to believe that acne is a problem that only teenagers experience, the fact is that acne can impact any age group.

symptoms of eczema include nighttime itching, red or brown skin discoloration, bumps that ooze fluid and harden when dry, scaly-looking, thick, cracked or dry skin, skin inflammation or sensitive, uncomfortable skin sensations. Complications that may arise from the symptoms of eczema include asthma, allergies, skin infections, insomnia, emotional problems or eye problems.

Usually, eczema is considered a chronic condition as it can take a long time to resolve. There may be long periods of remission, when the skin shows no symptoms. However in the presence of a trigger, such as pollen or dust, or after a stressful life event, symptoms of atopic dermatitis may come back. Other potential triggers for eczema include dry skin, bacteria and viruses, stress, excess sweat, hot and humid environmental conditions, wool, certain chemical cleansers and soaps, smoke/air pollution and certain foods like eggs, milk, wheat gluten or peanuts.

Due to the red and itchy nature of skin affected by eczema, acupuncture and Oriental medicine largely defines this condition as one related to heat. This manifestation of heat on the skin may stem from an internal imbalance (e.g. a weakened immune system), an allergic reaction (e.g. peanut allergy) or a combination of both these internal and external factors.

According to the philosophy of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, there are many reasons why the body may succumb to a heat condition and lead to the manifestation of eczema symptoms. Strong or prolonged emotions such as anger, rage or jealousy may contribute to a pathological buildup of heat. Overworking may also be a contributing factor, as this may interfere with other activities such as exercise and things that bring joy and pleasure into one's life.

Each patient will have a different set of circumstances. At the time of your visit, mention any emotional or behavioral difficulties you feel may be related to your eczema. This way, a treatment plan can be developed that will address all of your symptoms.

Acne often occurs when the hair follicles or pores become clogged from oil, dirt, dead skin cells, bacteria, environmental toxins or physical irritations on the surface of the skin. Hair follicles are connected to sebaceous glands, which secrete an oily substance known as sebum. Ordinarily, the secretion of sebum provides a luscious, healthy sheen to hair and skin. But there are times when the substance builds up, causing the pores to become plugged.

For some, acne may just simply be a nuisance from time to time, but for others the problem is chronic. Not only do they suffer from frequent acne breakouts, but also acne scarring. What's more, only as little as 11 percent of the 60 million Americans struggling with acne will seek professional treatment.

If you are showing symptoms of acne, even if it's not chronic and severe, you may want to consider an appointment. In addition to directly treating your skin condition through a personalized acupuncture treatment plan, you can also receive treatment if you experience emotional distress from your skin condition. Plus, if you seek treatment earlier rather than later, you may help reduce the incidence of permanent scarring.