

SHIATSU AND JOINT PROBLEMS

RESEARCH:

Research Project on the Perceived Effectiveness of Shiatsu Treatment. Clifford Andrews BSc, MRSS.

The first 9 conditions which include: General Health/wellbeing, ankle problems, headaches, joint problems, sciatica, back problems, emotional problems, shoulder problems, stress. Over 50% of the clients perceived the treatment as being +2 or Very Effective. In the second observable category which includes: Digestive problems, neck problems, menstrual problems, the perceived effectiveness was divided equally between the +1 (Effective) and +2 (Very Effective) scores but in each case over 80% of the sample found some benefit (+1 and +2 scores combined). A third group which includes depression, bowel problems/IBS, low energy, knee problems, showed a greater variety in the distribution of the scores. In depression slightly more +1 scores than +2 were recorded, although all of the sample indicated some benefit (+1 and +2 scores combined). Bowel problems and IBS proved difficult to treat giving the widest spread of scores amongst all the categories. Of the sample 40% indicated 0 or no change and 30% giving +1 and 30% giving +2. Low energy also proved to be a difficult category to completely resolve with 24% scoring +2 but a larger 55% feeling some benefit and scoring +1. Knee problems also appeared difficult to completely resolve, despite all of the sample reporting some benefit, only 17% scored +2 with 83% scoring +1.

Conclusions: A large majority of clients that responded to the Questionnaire perceived Shiatsu as being very effective. Two patterns emerged from the analysis of the responses; The most common conditions treated by Shiatsu in the sample shown, and also the relative perceived effectiveness of treatment of different conditions described. These show very promising results with some conditions which western medicine sometimes has difficulties in treating.

Shiatsu is perceived by the majority of clients in the sample as a complimentary approach to health management which is very effective for a wide range of common health problems.

CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

Practitioner: Sara Browne, MRSS

Client: Hilary McLeod

Age: 57

Occupation: Teacher

What were your main reasons for receiving Shiatsu?

General aches - particularly my legs and shoulders.

Do you feel Shiatsu has helped?

Yes.

If Yes, in what ways?

After treatment my whole body feels much more flexible eg, I don't feel as stiff in the mornings. Emotionally I feel more relaxed. I feel as if every part of my body has been re-energised and the flow of energy is unblocked. I also think I feel more peaceful - the tightness and aches have gone for a while.

How does Shiatsu compare to other treatments you have received?

I have reflexology - my feet and body respond well but Shiatsu provides an all over treatment which has different benefits.

Any other comments:

Shiatsu is a brilliant workout where everything is loosened and treated - it is balanced and specific to parts of my body which need extra focus.

Thinking about sleep patterns. Probably no different and energy levels the same so for me, Shiatsu has worked on the physical side more - less aching/tension, which then probably makes me more relaxed generally.

Shiatsu isn't as 'violent' as some treatments and I like to feel my arms/legs/shoulders being manipulated and stretched firmly where they need it.

The treatment is also a time of calm and a sense of healing, away from daily routine.

CASE STUDY 1

Personal History

R is 53 and lives in a small coastal village with her 2 dogs. She is in a long-term relationship and has a business with her partner. She also has a demanding full time job, with a regional post, which often requires travel all over the country. She has 2 grown sons who have been through college and are now quite independent.

R is somewhat overweight with saggy flesh, her upper body being more densely built than her legs. She exercises regularly, taking her dogs for walks twice a day. She also goes swimming occasionally and tries to incorporate exercises into her daily routine. She enjoys cooking and has a healthy diet with no meat. She sees this phase of her life as quite positive as she embraces the changes and is able to make more time for herself. She has been able to concentrate more fully on her love of writing, which has been something she has wanted to do for a while.

Medical History

R generally has a healthy constitution. Her main issue has been joint problems, which she attributes to a huge iron infusion when she had her last child in 1979. She has been prone to flu type symptoms, which often develop into chest infections, most often in Autumn. She has also been prone to sinus problems in the past and has occasional wheezing or coughing episodes and dry skin on occasions. Another major issue has been her sleeping patterns with frequent insomnia.

R has been involved in 3 car accidents (1972, 1994, 2004) and often suffers from discomfort in her neck and shoulders exacerbated by having to do a lot of driving or computer work. R has suffered from menopausal symptoms (hot flushes, lacking in energy) over the past 5 years and these seem to have subsided now. Her mother died about 2 years ago and although this stirred up difficult emotions, it also felt quite liberating for R at time when she wanted to reassess her life. She has been coming to me for treatments since I first started studying Shiatsu in 2000.

Presenting Symptoms:

- Joint pain
- Work stress
- Reassessment of life – post menopause
- Tendency to overweight
- Intermittent sleeping – insomnia
- Neck and shoulder stiffness

Aims:

To support R in her reassessment of life. Work with joints to create greater flow of energy. Release of tension in shoulders and neck.

Treatments:

1. 20.10.04 Kyo: BL Jitsu: HT

R feeling well generally. Slight tightness in chest. Some shoulder pain in left shoulder. Talked about diet, in particular macrobiotic diet.

R would like to lose some weight. Talked about doing some exercises on a more energetic level i.e. Tai Chi, Yoga.

2. 10.10.04 Kyo: LI Jitsu: HT

R in car accident. Left shoulder is more painful. Week off work and generally feeling well and stimulated. Feeling unsupported at work.

Upper body felt full with lower legs lacking. Strong connections on LI. Worked to disperse Ki in upper body, working shoulder points and LI 10. R knee wanted attention.

3. 1.12.04 Kyo: LIV Jitsu: SI

Last night was awake from 3-6am. Tension in shoulders, due to a lot of driving and computer work. Scanning indicated banding. Worked heavily on the hips but R welcomed work. Legs felt more energised with upper body more yielding. Work on shoulders and neck always creates release.

4. 22.12.04 Kyo: SP Jitsu: LIV

A bit tired today. Doing some work in the house and is feeling a bit achy. Heaviness in the shoulders and neck. General banding of energy. Treatment worked to create a more even distribution of energy and also to disperse energy downwards.

5. 2.02.05 Kyo: LI Jitsu: ST

Helping partner move house – some back strain. Too much sitting/driving. Very hectic work month. Flu bug after Xmas. Not exercising. Strong connections on LI & ST. Left side of body lacking, more energised after treatment. Neck tight and banding of chest area.

6. 16.02.05 Kyo: SI Jitsu: TH

Feeling well. Some shoulder ache. Joints good and diet.

L & R of SI noticeably different. More similar and yielding after treatment.

TCM Diagnosis

Metal tends to figure primarily in R's symptoms. She tends to wake early at 5am (LI time) and is prone to colds, which can lead to bronchitis particularly in the Autumn. She also has periods of dry skin and occasional wheezing relating to the function of elimination in LI. Her neck and shoulder pain could be attributable to meridian problems in LI or SI.

Frequent presentation of SI reflects the function of assimilation. Although there seems to be little evidence of physical symptoms relating to SI, emotionally R is going through a process of change as she digests the possibilities of what is available to her and makes appropriate choices, as to her own needs (rather than that of the family). The functioning of the Liver and Gall Bladder has been affected by R's process of planning and deciding on her life goals. The defensive quality of TH is evident in R feeling unsupported in her work role, with LI marking her ongoing struggle to 'let go' of associated responsibilities. Ongoing joint pain may be attributable to deficient Liver Blood where the Liver is slow to release blood to the muscles. Her abdominal structure with soft flabby flesh indicates a deficiency of Original Qi.

Zen Shiatsu Diagnosis

The last 2 years has been a time of significant change with the death of her mother and relinquishing of her financial responsibility of her sons, which has necessitated a period of 'letting go', mainly on an emotional level. The nature of her work can create a lot of stress with frequent travelling which tends to upset her diet affecting the functioning of the Spleen with Spleen Qi Deficiency evident

SI presents on three occasions and has presented regularly in past treatments. The disharmony evident in her body at times, with accompanying heaviness of legs is likely to be due to the process of assimilation. It is possible that the iron infusion that she had in 1979 created a shock to her body, (she describes it as this) with ongoing subsequent joint pain. The car accidents that she has been involved in are also likely to have created some inherent shock within the body, creating past hurts that may not have been fully assimilated, evident in her tendency to neck and shoulder pain. This is likely to have manifest in a Heart-Blood deficiency indicated by R's insomnia and pale complexion.

Results of treatments:

R's main focus for treatments was in relation to joint pain. This has progressively improved and she is only occasionally aware of any pain in her joints. Her neck and shoulder pain is relieved by treatments and is related to busy periods at work, which she is aware of. Her sleep is much more regular and she only occasionally suffers from insomnia. R is generally more aware of how her life and work affect her body and actively seeks to balance out elements.

Conclusions:

R comes for Shiatsu for 'general maintenance' and feels it supports her in her various roles. The last few years have been a time of change as she has been dealing with menopausal symptoms and coming to terms with her changing role in relation to her family. The Shiatsu has supported R to embrace all these changes and focus on her needs and where she wants to go with her life. In the past work has been a prominent stress, but this is now more of a functional role, allowing her more space to do other things which she has maybe not allowed herself to do in the past i.e. creative writing.

We have discussed the benefits of a macrobiotic diet and although R finds it difficult to follow this diet strictly she tries to incorporate elements of this diet, which she feels has benefited her joint pain. She also practices the Makho stretches as part of her daily exercise routine.

Hala Zaluckowska

ARTICLES

Treating Joints with Shiatsu

Notes to Accompany a Workshop

Clifford Andrews MRSS(T)

Diagnostic Phase

1. Whole Body Scan: I want to find out how the joint feels compared to the rest of the energy field. The WBS can tell me whether the joint feels weak, blocked, or whether it is an expression of a bigger movement of Ki in their energy field.
2. Hara Diagnosis: the Hara and the meridian analysis, tells me which functions are combining to create the Ki pattern in the joints. Every meridian function relates to joints, and how the diagnostic meridians combine, in the Kyo Jitsu reaction, gives me ideas on how I can treat. For example TH Jitsu LI Kyo could mean protecting the joint because of not being able to let go. The treatment would then focus on allowing the LI meridian Ki to release.
3. Meridian Scan: now I scan the diagnostic meridians into the joint. This tells me how the Kyo and Jitsu meridians are combined in the joint, and if either the Kyo or Jitsu meridian is dominant.
4. Vibrational Frequency Scan: I apply this to either the WBS or the meridian scan and it tells me at what level(s) the Ki in the joint is expressing itself, either physical, emotional, mental or spiritual.
5. Temporal Scan: this is useful if I want to explore how the joint problem has developed over time. I can 'feel out' the history, and in the case of trauma I have the option of treating back at the time of the accident.
6. Local diagnosis: I feel around the joint and confirm how the meridians are expressing themselves locally. I also check the Kyo Jitsu reaction locally.

Treatment phase

There are two main ways that I treat joints: locally and at a distance.

Local treatment

This consists of two approaches – balancing the Ki around the joint and balancing the Ki through the joint, by connecting the channels above and below.

Working Ki around the joint

I first assess the local Kyo and Jitsu pattern by palpating around the circumference of the joint. I then hold the Jitsu areas with my mother hand and treat the Kyo points, until the Ki around the joint is normalized as much as possible.

It is sometimes useful to rotate the joint. I find that Tsubos around the joint open up as I rotate and often mobility is increased by combining Tsubos work with rotations. I hold the Tsubos with the mother hand and feel them open as I rotate the joint. GB20, S10, LI11, L15, GB30, GB40 are all good points to hold during rotations of various joints.

Working Ki through the joint

Now I check the meridians running through the joint, starting with the diagnostic meridians. Concentrating on the Kyo meridians and tonifying them using two-handed connection technique above and below the joint, I continue until I have normalized the movement of Ki through the joint as much as possible.

If the joint I am working on is only affected on one side of the body (i.e. left or right), I like to work the good side first. I often find that this will help the imbalanced side, by resonance. It also gives me an idea of what their joint should feel like – I use this as a reference when I treat the problem joint on the other side.

Working with Distal points

In many cases I find it useful to work distally. If the joint is inflamed it can be impossible to work it directly. I use my mother hand to assess the joint as distal points are worked. Points that create change can be found by palpation.

If the joint is too sensitive to touch then the mother hand can assess etherically or the joint can be scanned. I find scanning useful if I can't reach the joint from the points I am using. For example I may use Kid 3 to treat the neck – if my client is tall there is no way I am going to be able to reach their neck with my mother hand, so I need to scan the neck to assess the effect of the point.

Meridian associations with the joints

All the meridians are associated with the joints. The functions of the meridians all contribute to the Ki of the joints. Below I have summarized the associations that I use the most when treating joints. You will find a mixture of Masunaga, Five Elements and TCM information.

Lung and Large Intestine

The Lungs govern the Ki from the breath and give vitality to the joints, and also are responsible for the structure of the joints. Vital, well-structured joints are a sign of good Lung Ki.

The Large Intestine is responsible for elimination of waste products from the joints, poor LI function can cause joint stiffness, and blockage along the LI channel through the joints (e.g. tennis elbow). On an emotional/mental level you need the elimination function to let go of structures in your life. Holding on emotionally/mentally can manifest in stiffness in the joints. Flexible well-structured joints are a sign of a good elimination function of the LI.

Stomach and Spleen

The ST/SP meridians are responsible for nourishing the joints by the intake of food and fluids and also for the transformation of Damp.

Poor ST/SP functions can lead to weakness in the joints, sometimes the person can be over weight – putting more strain on the joints. Fluid can also build up around the joints – typically the knees and ankles, which are connected to the ST/SP channel via the location of the meridian. The stability of the patella is influenced greatly by the strength of the ST/SP channels in the leg.

A stable patella, flexible but toned flesh around the joints, and strong knees and ankles are a sign of well functioning ST/SP meridians.

Heart and Small Intestine

The Heart can affect the joints physically via the Blood, a good supply of which is important for the joints to function well.

The Small Intestine function of protecting the body from shock often manifests in the joints, commonly the neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and hips. The SI is particularly common in whiplash injury of the neck.

A stable scapula and an ability to assimilate shocks without the physical structure being affected, are signs of stable HT/SI meridian Ki in the joints.

Kidney and Bladder Meridian

The BI and Kid meridians are related to the bones and synovial fluid. They are particularly important due to their relation with the Essence, so congenital or age-related disease of the bones and joints are often related to the Kidney.

Dryness, cracking and bone degeneration are commonly associated with Kidney Yin deficiency (TCM), while weakness in the joints can be associated with Kidney Yang deficiency.

On a spiritual level the 'Zhi' or Will, is manifested in movement through the energy of the joints.

Strong joints which age well without excessive dryness or degeneration are a sign of strong Kid/B1 Ki.

Triple Heater and Heart Protector

The Heart Protector is responsible, with the Heart, for supply of Blood to the joints. Good circulation is important for the joints. The TH protects the joints (together with the Lung) from invasion by pernicious influences such as Heat, Cold and Wind. It is also related to body fluids especially the lymph and, together with the Spleen, is often involved in swelling in the joints. The TH is also often significant in the neck, shoulder, elbow, and wrist, along the pathway of the channel.

Warm flexible joints that are not susceptible to invasion from outside the body indicate a strong HC/TH function.

Liver and Gall Bladder

The Liv and GB are directly related to the joints – the Liv “controls the sinews” (TCM). The Liv also houses the spiritual function of the ‘Hun’, which expresses our path through life. This involves decision making, decisions involve turning, and the joints are a physical expression of this turning function.

The Liv Yin governs the lubrication of tendons and joints (together with Kid Yin) so dry, stiff joints are often related to Liv.

On an emotional level, repression of any strong emotions (particularly anger and frustration) can lead to immobility on a physical level – felt as stiffness in the joints.

The Liv and GB channels are particularly important. The pathways are significant in all the major joints of the body, and points such as GB20, GB21, GB30, GB40 are commonly used for treating joint problems.

Healthy flexible joints that are strong but supple, are a sign of smooth flowing Ki in the LIV and GB meridians.

Pathogenic Factors

Sometimes I find that the most important thing that is affecting a particular joint is an external pathogenic factor (TCM). I have found it useful to be able to feel and understand how to treat these pathogenic factors as it gives me another way of addressing the problem. Each pathogenic factor is connected to a meridian, but the pathogenic factor will often spread through the whole joint and not just affect a particular channel.

The pathogenic factors are Heat, Cold, Wind, Damp and Dryness:

Heat can usually be felt etherically. Cooling points, dietary recommendations and direct application of cold (e.g. cold pack) are things I use to treat Heat in the Joints.

Cold can be felt on palpation. Moxa is great for driving out Cold – I usually get my client to do it at home to save me having my clinic smoked out! Alternatively I tonify the Ki. Ki is Yang and I often find it possible to expel Cold by increasing the Ki flow to the joint. Mindset is useful too – just think “Heat”. I make sure they do basic things – like wear enough clothes, and avoid sitting on concrete steps, etc.

Wind often manifests with sudden onset pains which move about, Shiatsu is effective for this. I use Wind expelling points such as GB20. Because Wind is associated with the Liver I sometimes find rotations help expel Wind. You can make sure they avoid drafts and wrap up in the wind.

Damp is seen as swelling around the joint, and is often associated with Sp weakness. It is usually possible to move Damp locally during the session, but chronic conditions can take time to resolve and you need to balance out the whole body and its ability to transform Damp. I often give dietary recommendations, but also watch out for exposure to Damp, e.g. in their house.

Dryness is felt by rotating the joint and feeling or hearing a grating sound. Stimulating the Ki around the joint leads the Blood flow to increase (Ki leads the Blood-TCM). The Blood is Yin, and will help moisten Dryness in the joint. I have found that it is often possible to create significant change even in chronic cases of Dryness in the joint. Rotations are a good way of checking – you can feel the grating reduce as the Dryness reduces.

Conclusion

Joint problems are common in Shiatsu and we have a whole range of techniques to help our clients. The success you will have depends on how much the joints have degenerated, and how well your client responds to Shiatsu. I have often been amazed by how powerful Shiatsu. I have often been amazed by how powerful Shiatsu is at treating supposedly irreversibly degenerated joints.