**Acupuncture I**

*“A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book.”*

*—Irish proverb.*

Even if it’s not a patient’s chief complaint, disordered sleep is one of the most common problems confronting the acupuncture practitioner. Improving sleep quality can help patients with pain, mood, immunity, and even metabolic states.1 Poor sleep can be a result of a relative excess of sympathetic tone in conditions, such as tinnitus,2 polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS),3 fibromyalgia,4 and menopause.5 Acupuncture and acupressure may improve sleep quality by regulating autonomic balance as measured by heart rate variability (HRV). A three-pronged approach to treating sleep disorders in the acupuncture clinic follows:

(1) Educate the patient on basic sleep hygiene, with recommendations for safe over-the-counter remedies (e.g., melatonin) that preserve “sleep architecture” for intractable insomnia.

(2) Alleviate the presenting clinical condition (e.g., pain, irritable bowel syndrome, asthma) with appropriate acupuncture needling.

(3) Stimulate, either manually or with electrical acupuncture, acupoints that have been documented to regulate the autonomic nervous system, such as PC 6,6 HT 7, ST 36, *Sishencong*,7 and *Yin Tang*.8

In two recent relevant clinical cases, involving (1) tinnitus and (2) PCOS, symptoms diminished and sleep improved with use of acupuncture.

***Case 1—***A 47-year-old male with tinnitus received acupuncture weekly over a 4-month period, including points PC 6 and H 7. Treatment resulted in improved sleep quality and decreased tinnitus intensity. HRV analysis revealed a low-frequency/high-frequency (LF/HF) decrease over the course of treatment from 3.29 to 1.3.

***Case 2—***A 32-year-old female with PCOS experienced improved sleep, mood, and regularity of menstrual cycles after 3 months of weekly acupuncture treatments, including points ST 36 and HT 7. HRV analysis showed a decrease in her LF/HF ratio from 0.44 to 0.22 over the treatment course.

Acupuncture therapy has far-reaching effects not only on specific clinical problems, but because its autonomic effects, may enable patients to achieve better sleep. HRV analysis may help to elucidate some of the physiologic mechanisms underlying these benefits.

**References**

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