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### Natural Help for Headaches and Migraines

Headaches and migraines are common conditions I frequently encounter in my Traditional Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture practice. Bothersome to downright debilitating, headaches can make it difficult to work effectively, to perform daily tasks, and even to think straight! At worst, a client may be bed-ridden for days with a migraine, curtains drawn and doors closed to all light and noise.

Western medicine tends to focus on damage control – aiming to dull the pain with drugs. Even if this approach is successful in allowing a client to function, the headaches eventually come back, because the root cause of the condition has not been addressed. Ironically, pain-killers can actually exacerbate the source of the problem, as an already stressed liver is forced to work even harder, now having to detoxify drugs from the system.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), headaches are usually rooted in an imbalance in the Liver system. In TCM, the term “Liver” describes not only the actual organ, but also its energetic function. The Liver keeps the *Qi* (bioenergy) and blood flowing smoothly through the body and mind. When this flow is obstructed, the Liver energy becomes bottle-necked and tends to rise to the head and get stuck there, causing a headache.

I have found the combination of Acupuncture and Chinese herbs very effective in treating headaches. Chinese medicine is special in that it seeks to correct the root imbalance that is causing the symptoms, rather than just getting rid of them. Treatment is streamlined for each client, and their individual needs. Once the source of the problem is addressed and the energy is flowing more smoothly, the symptoms naturally fall away.

The Liver energy can become stagnant or sluggish for many reasons, the most common being stress, anger or frustration, an overly rich diet, and toxins in our food and water. Alcohol or drug use (including prescription drugs) also puts a strain on the Liver. For women, headaches often accompany the menstrual period, when the flow of Liver *Qi* is at its peak. The common symptoms of PMS – irritability, sore breasts, cramping and bloating - are all signs of Liver *Qi* stagnation.

It is the Liver *Qi* that guides us along our path in life, toward our goals. If there are obstructions along our path (self-created or otherwise), or we are not on the right life path for us, the Liver energy becomes stagnant. Beyond physical symptoms, we may also experience emotional symptoms such as a feeling of “stuckness” in life, anger, frustration, impatience, indecision or depression.

Many clients have commented that in addition to having fewer headaches (or none!), they just feel better all-round. Many have introduced healthy changes in their life after receiving acupuncture treatments. “I feel more like myself again!” is a common comment. This is because Chinese Medicine addresses the whole person, and helps to rebalance us in body, mind and spirit.

When the energy in our body is moving better, our emotional energy also flows better, and we feel happier, more energetic, and more flexible and resilient in life. I feel fortunate to have been a part of so many clients getting their life back on track!

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