

Did you know that eight out of 10 people worldwide will experience low back pain at one point in their lives? That's 80 percent of the population. That is a staggering number. What I want to talk about today is how acupuncture and Chinese medicine can help bring those people relief.

Today I'm going to share the risk factors, the causes, the Western disorders that contribute to low back pain, as well as, of course, treatment using acupuncture, Chinese medicine, and so much more.

I'm also going to share a personal story and a patient story that you are going to love because it completely transformed his view on acupuncture. Are you ready? Let's go!

Welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture because after all, acupuncture rocks!

For most people, low back pain is going to start in their 30s and 40s. And eventually past 50, it becomes much more prevalent with the whole population. I experienced my very first low back pain when I went on holiday in Hawaii.

It was our first time in Hawaii on the island of Kauai, which is so beautiful. We hiked the first three days, snow cold, sat on the beach, went for walks.

Had a blast. The fourth day we played tennis in the morning and in the middle of the tennis game, I felt something happen in my lower back. Now remember that lower back is usually encompassing lumbar and sacrum. And I felt like my L4, L5, because I'm aware of my body, something happened. I continued to play tennis and then we finished and I said to my husband, I don't feel good.

My lower back is really not happy. I felt like almost a disc in my lower back slipped. It really felt like this, like something slipped and the pain got worse and worse and worse. And a few hours later, I was in excruciating pain. It was so bad. I was crying. I didn't know what position would help. Sitting didn't help.

Standing didn't help. Laying down was making it worse. The best for me was to continue to take little steps and walk. But eventually I didn't sleep all night. I was in so much pain. The next morning we looked for something to give me relief. So I found a chiropractor close to where we were staying and he looked at my back and he said, I've never seen this.

It looks like you have a massive pineapple sticking out of your sacrum. So he said my L4 L5 area was so inflamed, he couldn't touch me. So we look for an acupuncturist. Now, the

acupuncturist was able to needle me while I was standing up. I could not lay down. This was just possible. I was in so much pain.

So while I was standing up, he kneed my lower back bladder, 40 behind my knee. needled me and then I just kept walking back and forth little step while being in the treatment room. That was the best for me. Now it helped for a little bit of time, but it didn't last because I was in so much pain due to the fact that my disc was herniated and I kind of felt that, right?

The rest of my vacation was horrible and when I had to sit in the plane for six hours, I was in so much pain and at the end, my husband and a gentleman sitting next to us had to help me get up because I couldn't even get up.

I was so, so much in pain. We made it home and yes, it was herniated and after that I had regular acupuncture with electrostimulation and I was better but it took about a couple of weeks of acupuncture before I felt better. This happened in my late thirties. And so it has recurred a few times where the pain was really bad, but now I know what to do right away, which is to get acupuncture ASAP to be able to walk while the needles are in, which a lot of people say, what? The needles are in and you're walking. Yes. It's actually, I've done it with patients.

It's actually very useful when the patient cannot. Lay down and it works really well as long as it's little step and you're staying to supervise the patient. Of course We don't leave this patient alone. Make sense? Okay So that was my little story behind it and I have to really do a lot of work to keep my back strong And healthy because I don't want to have any issue When it comes to this because I know how painful it can be What are the risk factors that can contribute to low back pain?

Well, one of them is trauma injury. Makes sense, right? The second risk factor is weight gain in the abdominal region, which contributes to low back pain because there's an imbalance between the weight in the front and in the back.

This is why pregnant women have low back pain quite often as their belly expands as the baby grows, right? And we are going to talk about how we can treat low back pain with pregnant women because there are a lot of points that we cannot use during pregnancy.

The next risk factor is weak core muscles. I worked in the fitness industry for 15 years and a lot of people had weak core muscles. Core muscles, weak abdominal region and weak lower back.

So trying to strengthen the core with exercises that really build the core will prevent low back pain later on. So that's really important to keep our core strong. The next one is. Some jobs, people sit all day in front of their computers and then they're going to have the posture that's really, really bad for many hours.

And that's going to eventually with time contribute to low back ache and low back pain. Also for people that stand all day, like hairdressers or security guards. Standing on your feet all day also

can contribute to lower back pain or people that do a lot of lifting in their jobs. That's repetitive movement over the years that eventually will lead to pain in the lower back.

That makes sense, right? The next mixed factor, which is a surprising one, is smoking. My mom smoked for 60 years, two packs a day, a very French woman. And she always had low back pain starting in her 60s, 70s. But often, this contributes to sciatica and low back pain. Which is kind of surprising, right?

So that's one that always shocked me, but it is a risk factor. Other risk factors are degenerative disc disease, osteoarthritis, diabetes, ankylosis, spondylitis.

scoliosis and other disorders that are already there that can contribute to low back pain. Make sense? Okay. Now, when it comes to Western disorders, there are many that are going to be connected to low back pain, like sciatica, of course, like I just mentioned, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, but also kidney stones, pelvic inflammatory disease, which PID is usually going to radiate to the low back and contribute to that as well.

So gynecological disorders, pregnancy, which is not a disorder, but can contribute of course and be a cause of low back pain, right? So there are many disorders that can lead to low back pain. This is why actually in Google search acupuncture for whatever the disorder is, low back pain is number one.

This is the most searched term when it comes to acupuncture, acupuncture for low back pain. Then it's for weight loss, headaches, anxiety, et cetera, but low back pain is number one. That means we are here to give relief to all our patients, right?

What are the treatment options? So before I talk about acupuncture, what are the treatment options for patients who experience low back pain? Number one is medication, specifically anti inflammatories. Then there is physical therapy, acupuncture, massage therapy, but there's also exercises like qigong, tai chi, pilates, yoga, to help strengthen the core as well and to help relieve the pain.

Medical doctors can also offer corticosteroids injection to relieve the pain.

It's usually momentary. It doesn't last for a long time if people have chronic low back pain. Unfortunately, there's also surgery, and that's the most invasive, usually it's the last resort for most patients. So So if we can help them avoid surgery, this is fantastic. And this is why acupuncture and Chinese medicine is such a great tool because if we can avoid surgery, it's a big win.

Of course, there are lifestyle adjustment that's important to discuss with patients if they are overweight, specifically in the belly area, or if they are sitting at their computer all day long and their job contributes to lower back pain to ask them to make some change.

Maybe having a standing desk or having a chair that's ergonomically perfect for their lower back, right? We can educate the patients on how they can contribute to helping themselves and, making sure that they are strengthening their core muscle as well and do the exercise.

So education should be our number one priority to help patients. And then there's treatments.

Now let's talk about our strength, Chinese medicine, and acupuncture. When a patient comes for the first time with low back pain, we have to ask the right questions. The more information we get, the better. Because we want to make a TCM diagnosis, it is going to give us a better understanding on how to select our point for better outcome. So even though it's an acute or chronic low back pain, we still want to do a TCM diagnosis and we're going to discuss what are the main common pattern in TCM and how to treat them depending on symptoms.

Now we have acute low back pain versus chronic low back pain. The first thing I want to say is you want to ask when was the onset? How long has it been going? Is it the first time? Is it a recurring problem? What is the health history behind the lower back?

So that is going to give us clues. Then the pain. Is it better with heat? Better with cold? Is it better with exercise? Or is it better when you rest? All those are going to give us clues, right

What kind of pain is this? Is this an ache? Or is this sharp? Is it traveling down, or up, or around? Or is it fixed in one area? If it's fixed and sharp, it's always a blood stasis. If it's dull or an ache, it's usually more of coming from a deficiency. Is it feeling better or worse?

If it's better on rest, then that's a deficiency. If it's better on exercise, then that's a excess. Makes sense, right? If the pain is traveling, there's liver qi stagnation and blood stasis as well. If the pain comes and goes, it's also a liver qi stagnation. So those little clues are going to help us in our treatment and selecting points.

Yes? Okay.

Let's talk about the basic acupuncture points for lower back. Bladder 40 has to be there because it's the commander point of the lower back, which encompasses always the lumbar and the sacrum. So if it's affecting the glute, obviously, and around the sacrum area and the lumbar, we want to use bladder 40.

Spleen 6 is a surprise one because a lot of time we don't think of that point, but it is the commander point of the hip, which encompasses the whole pelvic area, which means if the lower back travels down to the hip flexors or there is gynecology issue that starts in the front and travels towards the lower back, that is a point we're going to use.

Plus spleen 6 is the crossing point of the liver, kidney, and spleen. Spleen relates to muscle, kidney to bones, and liver to ligament joints and tendons. Which often, when there's low back pain, all those three entities are going to be affected.

So spleen 6 both have to be there when it comes to low back pain. Now if we have a pregnant woman, we cannot do spleen 6, right? And bladder 40 is not always easy depending on the position the patient can sit. So if they can lay down on their side, great, we can do bladder 40. But if they cannot and they have to sit up, then we can't do bladder 40. We have other points that we will do and we'll talk about this when we talk about pregnancy, okay?

But in general, spleen 6, bladder 40, great combo to put on anyone that has low back pain.

Now let's talk about the most common pattern when it comes to low back. First one would be damp and cold. This is excess damp and excess cold affecting the lower back. This is acute low back pain that feels cold to the touch.

So when you put your hand on it, the low back feels really cold. This happens a lot with sciatica where you touch the area where the pain is, and it's really cold. The pain is. More of an ache and it feels heavy. Now, when the pain is severe, it radiates down the leg and it's worse with cold rainy days and it improve with rest, right?

Which can be sciatica, which can be arthritis, it can be a lot of different disorders, but the pain is worse on cold rainy days. So the idea is, of course, we want to do moxa. We want to put heat on it because it's going to feel so much better.

The first acupuncture point we're going to use is Yao Tong. Yao Tong is A O T O N G. And it is actually two points located on the dorsum or the back of the hand.

Those two points are located on the dorsum, or the back of the hand, between the fourth and fifth metacarpal bone, and the other one is between the second and third metacarpal bone, because there are two points. And actually, often, if you massage those points or press on them, they're going to be very tender, For a lot of people, so Yao Tong are two points that are very useful that patients can massage on the back of the hand and Let's say the lower back pain is on the right, we would do Yaotong on the left hand and vice versa.

That's probably the best way. If the lower back is on the entire back, then you would have to do both sides. Bladder 40, we talked about this before, spleen 6 would be a good point at this time. For distal point, bladder 60 is also really good. Gallbladder 34, because gallbladder 34 is the influential point of the joint, ligament, and tendons, which are affecting the area as well.

And then we want to do local points, like bladder 23, or wherever the pain is. And we want to moxa that whole area, specifically DU 4, governing vessel for.

The next pattern that is very common is the opposite of damp cold. It's still damp, but now with heat. So this is again acute lower back, but this time it's hot and swollen. And the pain is worse with heat or humid weather. That's what happened to me when I was in Hawaii. The pain is not improved by rest.

The person is irritable, thirsty, has dark scanty urine, and could be sweating easily. Now we're going to start with Yao Tong, again, the two points on the dorsum of the hand, bladder 40. Again, this is very similar, right?

Gallbladder 34, bladder 60. And this time we're not doing moxa, of course, because we don't want to add heat. We want to clear the heat. So large intestine 11 would be a good point. DU 14 can also be a good point because it's in the back, right? And we want to do local point. Again, you could do bladder 23, which is the back shu point of kidney on the lower back at L2 or wherever the pain is.

Those are basic points. Of course, you can add up more, but I just wanted to start with the basics.

The next one, which is still acute, it's wind damp, external pathogen, wind and damp invasion. So again, it's acute for the low back pain.

It's very achy and heavy and stiff. Like the back feels really stiff. It's really hard to move. It feels like it's stiff, it takes us a while to kind of be able to move around, right? The body feels very heavy. The person also has a headaches and a mild fever and chills. So it's kind of like a, little bit of a pain.

external pathogen invasion that could be due to a cold or a flu, right? And so for this, we want to expel the pathogen and strengthen the immune system with stomach 36, lung 7, expel the pathogen with large intestine 4. We want to use gallbladder 20, which is in the back of the head to kind of expel the pathogen.

And we still want to use Yao Tong, those two points on the back of the head. Plus you can of course do local points on the area affected. Make sense?

Growing up, I was a big fan of tennis and I used to watch all the games. And my favorite players were John McEnroe, even Landau, Andre Agassi.

If you're from my generation in the eighties, you know who I'm talking about. A few years ago, I read the biography of Andrew Agassi called Open. It was such a beautiful book. It was very emotional. He wrote from the heart.

And if you've never read this book, I would recommend it because I absolutely loved it. He talks about his hate of tennis and why he played and it's just very emotional book. But the way the book starts is eye opening on what an athlete life is like after they're not playing anymore.

The book starts when he's 36 years old and he can barely get out of bed in the morning because he has so much pain in the back. His lower back is in excruciating pain, very stiff. And so his wife knows that the kids cannot go into the bedroom until he gets up, slowly crawls on his fours all the way to the bathroom and takes his time to get up to go under the shower.

Then he puts some hot water and takes a shower for 40 minutes and his achy stiff painful lower back starts to loosen up and eventually 45 minutes later he can join his family for breakfast. He says in the book he's 36 years old but he feels like he's 96.

This is what happens a lot with repetitive injury. That is also a cause of low back pain, and specifically for high level athletes like Andre Agassi, when he hurt himself, what do they do? They put freezing agent over it and they continue to play for hours. This really delays the healing process and creates a lot of issue Later on in life, so that's something to keep in mind when treating athletes, I just wanted to share this story because it's very relevant to what we see in practice and if you do treat athletes, maybe not high level, but people that play really strong, tough sports and carry on, even though they're injured, we're going to see a lot of those people with issues with back pain, right?

The next pattern, which is very common, is blood stasis. It's sharp, piercing, stabbing pain that is fixed in the lower back and that is worse with pressure. So those people do not want a massage. The massage is not going to make them feel better, it is going to make them feel worse. Moving makes it worse as well.

It's worse at night, worse with movement. It's very difficult to move. This is pretty much also what happened to me when I was, in Hawaii. It was very much a blood stasis with invasion of, I think, pathogen damp and heat.

So this could be sciatica, uh, low back injury, but no matter what, the blood stasis is always sharp.

Okay. Piercing Fixed Low Back Pain. We are going to start with, of course, with Yao Tong and Bladder 40. You can add up Spleen 6 as well. The best points to move blood and move Qi to relieve pain is Large Intestine 4 and Liver 3. Gallbladder 34 to affect the joints, ligaments, and tendons. And then because it's blood stasis, often Spleen 10 or Bladder 17 would be very useful as well as local point.

Now sometimes we can put Needles in a local area and sometimes people do not even want to have the needles in there and that's okay and often you can use, for example sometimes Distal Points works really well.

Specifically, Master Tongue or Dr. Tan balance method can be very useful when it comes to this.

The next pattern is liver qi stagnation. Liver qi stagnation is going to be low back pain radiating to the rib area that is worse when we are stressed. It's going to be a distending pain, kind of like it feels like it's expanding.

It's moving, like I said. And it's usually associated with temporal headaches and moodiness. This is probably one of the easiest ones to treat in clinical practice. We want to move liver chi with liver 3, large intestine 4, and then we want to do yaotong, because that's the lower back best distal extra point, and we want to do bladder 40.

We can do liver 14 if we wanted to, to kind of relax the liver itself, and gallbladder 34 for the joint, tendons, ligaments, right? Liver 14 would be great for the rib area as well. I haven't seen a lot of liver tree stagnation, low back pain, unless it was coming from maybe kidney stones and it radiates in the rib area, but it's not that common for me in clinical practice.

The last two are going to be deficiency. We have spleen qi deficiency that can cause low back pain. Something we don't always associate low back pain with spleen, right? So this could also be for patients with fibromyalgia, for example, or patients with poor muscle tone, specifically, like we said at the beginning, the core area, or people that sit all day at their desk with poor posture.

So we're going to have chronic Heavy low back ache. It's not massive pain. It's just achy, right? Heavy limbs, specifically lower leg, are going to feel really heavy. Loose stools, fatigue, that is a spleen qi deficiency that is going to show up with some achy low back pain. So I see this in clinical practice, like I said, with people that have a job where they sit all day, they have poor posture, or for people that are overweight as well.

So we want to do bladder 40, yao tong, gallbladder 34, spleen 6, all the same basic points. And then we want to tonify spleen she with stomach 36, We could do bladder 20, the back shu point of spleen. That would be really useful. We can do spleen 9 because when there's spleen qi deficiency, there's a dampness that accumulates, right, because spleen is not able to transform and transport all the fluid.

So that we can use as well, and that is a base, and then of course, I would use spleen 21. It was fibromyalgia, I would use spleen 21, one of the best point for fibromyalgia, because it's the major lower connecting point of the spleen, which connects to all the muscular region of the body.

Of course, in TCM, we associate lower back pain with the kidneys, right? So kidney chi deficiency going towards kidney yang deficiency is very much going to show up a lot in older people. It is a chronic low back pain that is dull and constant. So it's an ache, it's not strong, but it's achy and it's always there.

Thank you. The people that experience this are going to feel really good with massage. They love the heat on it and they love the massage on it. It makes them feel better. It's going to be

worse on cold days. So this could be arthritis, right? Obviously related, but not always necessarily. It is worse on exertion or too much sexual activity.

Those patients also have weak knees, poor digestion, tendency to have low libido, and retain water in the lower limbs, like edema of the ankles. The best points, again, are going to be your spleen 6, your yao tong, gallbladder 34, bladder 40. We also want to put the back shu point of kidney, bladder 23. We can use bladder 20, 21, 29. And we could do, do 4, or governing vessel 4, specifically if it was really young deficiency by then, then we would do MOXA to help bring more fire to the lower back area.

I wanted to give you the common pattern we see in clinical practice so you can start with that base.

And then of course, there's other patterns that can emerge as well. This is not just exclusive.

At the beginning we talked about pregnancy and low back pain. I have an entire course online on demand on pregnancy if you feel not confident in treating pregnant women.

You can check it out. The link is below in the show notes. However, Let's talk about low back pain for pregnant women. We cannot do spleen 6. We could do bladder 40, it's a safe point, if you are putting the patient on the lateral position. You cannot needle the lower back, the lumbar, during pregnancy at all.

So what do I do when patients have low back pain? I usually use the Dr. Tan Balance Method, Which is a great micro system to address low back pain. My patients will sit on the treatment table reclined with their knee elevated, their back elevated, so they're really sitting.

And we can do gallbladder 34 as a joint, ligament, tendon point. We can't do large intestine 4 at all or spleen 6, right? We said that. So what we're gonna do is use points that are distal and use points like master tongue, or Dr. Tan balance method. If you haven't learned this method, this is fantastic, specifically as a micro system.

I have a patient story you're going to love. This gentleman was in his 60s and he had excruciating back pain. His daughter, who's my patient, told him to come and see me. And he said, acupuncture is a sham. It's placebo. It doesn't work. I'm not going to go and do that. And eventually he was still in pain and she said, just do something about it. Go see Clara. So he made an appointment, came to see me and he said, listen, I don't believe this is going to help me.

I'm here just to make my daughter happy because I love her. But I know this is not going to work. It's all placebo. I love when patients say that because it's like, great, let's see what happened. So I said to him, you know what? That's okay. You came in, you're here. We're going to try it. And if it doesn't help you, you are right.

And you can go back to tell your daughter that you were right. I did a treatment for him, and I explained how acupuncture works. I said, you know, acupuncture is not this woo woo thing that most people think it is. It's actually every time I put a needle in a certain area, I trigger a minute nerve that sends signal to your brain to decrease inflammation and to self regulate, basically, to self heal.

And he totally got that. He's like, huh, oh, that's interesting. He went home after the treatment, didn't make a second appointment, calls me the next day screaming in the phone. He says, I can't believe this. My pain is gone. I'm telling all my friends they have to try acupuncture. This is the best thing I've ever heard of.

he says, I spent hours going online, trying to understand how this works. It is amazing. I'm a believer. I'm telling everybody. This is why we do what we do because no matter what, even when people don't believe it, so I guess it's not placebo, it still works.

This to me is fantastic. And this happens so many times in practice. I'm sure it happened to you as well. Now, if you wanted a specific in depth course, when it comes to low back pain, Rebecca Stephens, who's one of my dear friend is very, very good at teaching musculoskeletal Disorders.

She has designed a course that's on AcuPro Academy. The link will be below for you to treat patients with low back pain. And it is fantastic. So check it out because people have come back and said it is a game changer when it comes to low back pain. and acupuncture is great. What else can we help patients with? Cupping is fantastic for low back pain. Electrostimulation can be an add on to your needling when there's a lot of blood stasis and acute sharp pain, adding electrostimulation can also help increase the outcome.

Cupping, fantastic. You can do Gua Sha as well. Tuina, depending on each patient and what their pattern is, excess or deficiency, those are tools we can add up as well.

For chronic low back pain, we have a lot of great Chinese herbal formulas that can be also prescribed to patients. We have an amazing toolbox when it comes to Chinese medicine and acupuncture for back pain.

If you've missed the YouTube live I did on acupuncture points for acute pain anywhere in the body, check it out because it's one of my most popular ones and you might want to bypass the singing at the beginning, but I hope you benefit from it as well as you did this one.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. I truly hope you benefited from this episode, and I would love for you to share it with a friend that may benefit from it as well, follow the show, leave a review, and if you want more. Go to my website, acuproacademy.com. I have tons of resources there with treatment protocols, case studies, free courses, and so much more, and connect with me on all social media at acuproacademy.com.

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