

When faced with a daunting task, it may help to make a list of the things we have

*(Continued from 'Dial Down Stress')*

control over and a list of the things we can't control—then make a plan to act on the manageable one and let the others go.

"Mindfulness is also about keeping our self-judging and ruminating mind at bay, which may keep repeating, 'I'm not doing enough,'" she says. "Realize that you do not have to listen to every thought that comes into your head. Ask yourself, 'What is the most important thing for me to focus on right now?'"

Greenberg also says it's important to aim to broaden and brighten our view in tough times, explaining, "Feeling stress biases your brain to think in terms of avoiding threat and loss, rather than what you can gain or learn from the situation." Start by jotting down three ways this challenging situation may be beneficial in the long run; also make a list of things and people we are grateful for, she suggests.

"Practicing gratitude helps you realize that you have a choice about what to focus your attention on and you don't have to let stressors take all the joy out of life," according to Greenberg. As an added bonus, "You're less likely to take your stress out on loved ones when you think about what they mean to you and how they have helped you," she says.

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# Acupuncture for a Peaceful Mind and a Restful Night

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.,



According to the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) 35% of Americans report that their sleep quality is "poor" or "only fair." Moreover, roughly 60 million Americans are affected by a variety of sleep disorders each year. Research has indicated that acupuncture can increase the content of y-amino butyric acid within the body, which enhances sleep quality. Another study found that acupuncture increased nighttime melatonin production as well as sleep time. Furthermore, there is strong clinical evidence that acupuncture is an effective treatment option for a sleep issue such as insomnia, especially when accompanied by relentless ruminating thoughts.

Typical symptoms of insomnia include having difficulty falling asleep, waking up in the middle of the night without being able to go back to sleep, waking up very early in the morning and not able to return to sleep as well as sleep accompanied by disruptive dreams.

Acupuncture is a painless procedure that involves the insertion of thin needles into points located along energy pathways known as meridians. It works by opening and releasing blockages that occur along these meridian pathways, thus restoring proper body function and maximizing innate healing capability.

According to Chinese medicine, an imbalance between the energies of yin and yang is a root cause of insomnia. Each individual is viewed from a holistic perspective and approached as having a unique energetic predisposition leading to their insomnia symptomology. However, the most common energetic pattern of disharmony associated with sleep problems include liver qi stagnation, excess heart fire and kidney yin deficiency.

An individual that is anxious along with their insomnia would most likely have a combination of a kidney and heart patterns of disharmony. They would complain of having difficulty falling asleep due to

ruminating thoughts, report having restless sleep and/or awaken on and off throughout the night with anxiety.

In this case, the acupuncture would be applied to establish harmony between the kidney and heart energy systems. This serves to calm the heart and pacify spirit to resolve anxiety and also nourish blood flowing to the head to alleviate insomnia. Moreover, strong kidney energy calms the mind, while releasing fear and extraneous thoughts to allow for ease with falling and staying asleep.

The following is a Chinese medicine home remedy that stimulates the acupuncture point known as Kidney 1 (yong quan) to increase grounding through the drawing of excessive energy downward from the upper part of the body, especially the head. It is this excessive energy, which is believed to be the cause of overthinking and continuous ruminating thoughts precluding one from falling asleep.

Chinese Medicine Sleep Remedy: Just before bedtime do a footbath in a bowl of warm water for fifteen minutes. Relax your body and visualize the soles of the feet being rooted into the earth through the

acupuncture point Kidney 1 during this experience.

After the footbath is complete and feet are dry, apply thumb pressure to Kidney 1 on the soles of both feet and massage them in a circular motion for 1-3 minutes. Kidney 1 is found within the depression along the centerline of the sole of each foot, approximately one third of the distance between the end of the toes and the heel. It can be easily located by curling toes inward.

While massaging this point, visualize the drawing downward of excessive energy held within your head and redistribute it throughout the entire body. This can also be combined with a more general massage of the entire bottoms of the feet. When done, it is now time to get into bed and enjoy a peaceful and restful sleep. An acupuncturist may also choose to treat Kidney 1 along with other acupuncture points to resolve the pattern of disharmony at the root of insomnia. It also treats the whole body to establish balance of the mind, body and spirit, with special attention paid to establishing proper flow of qi (vital energy) to restore health and wellbeing.

Such treatment is decided upon after an acupuncturist conducts a comprehensive evaluation to determine the root cause of insomnia, followed by determination of one's Chinese medicine diagnosis and individualized treatment plan. In most instances, it is necessary to receive a course of 10-15 weekly treatments for optimal results, although each person has different needs. Acupuncture has been an excellent remedy for sleep difficulty for centuries and continues to be of help to many people. It is used to treat symptoms as they arise and to prevent future occurrences through restoring and maintaining energetic balance, respectively. Most recipients of acupuncture report a deep sense of calmness, relaxation and overall sense of wellbeing from their treatments – an experience that carries over to the creation of restful and peaceful sleep for many nights to come.

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Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

~Helen Keller

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