

How Do You Treat *Urticaria* in Your Practice?

URTICARIA IS KNOWN as *Feng Zhen Kuai* (Wind rash patch) in Chinese Medicine. It comes in two varieties: acute and chronic. Acute urticaria is generally attributed to an external invasion of Wind-Heat or Wind-Cold in the context of a Wei Qi deficiency induced by Lung and/or Spleen Qi imbalance.¹ When the Lung Qi is deficient, the invasion occurs through the skin or respiratory tract after exposure to pollens or irritant fumes. When the Spleen Qi is affected, there is an accumulation of Damp-Heat, which then manifests in the skin after exposure to triggers such as shellfish. Chronic urticaria, on the other hand, is usually attributed to an internal stirring of Wind and Heat, in association with Blood deficiency.

One simple acupuncture approach involves 4–8 standard points, supplemented by 1 or 2 pattern-specific points determined by pulse and tongue findings.^{1,2} Acute urticaria is generally straightforward. Picture four basic points: LI 11 (Qichi); SP 10 (Xuehai); ST 36 (TSusanli); and SP 6 (San-yinjiao), either alone or together with a couple of pertinent points for Wind-Heat or Wind-Cold (See Tables 1 and 2). One or two treatments are often sufficient.

Chronic urticaria is more of a challenge, and a course of 6–12 treatments once or twice a week would seem reasonable. In the latter case, picture the same 4 basic points plus LI 4 (Hegu), BL 40 (Weizhong), GB 20 (Fengchi) and GB 31 (Fengshi), along with points to build the Blood (see Tables 1 and 2), and then add some ear points, sending the patient home with a tack or two in place.² The main ear points to explore are Lung, Endocrine, Subcortex (Thala-

mus) and Shenmen, with secondary options including Sympathetic, Adrenals (stress control), and the urticarial (Allergy) point (Fig. 1).

Herbs are always useful adjuncts and can be aimed at the putative imbalance. For example, for Wind-Heat, use Xiao Feng Tang (Derma Wind Release [Kan Herbs, visit: www.kanherb.com]); for Wind-Cold, use Gui Zhi Tang

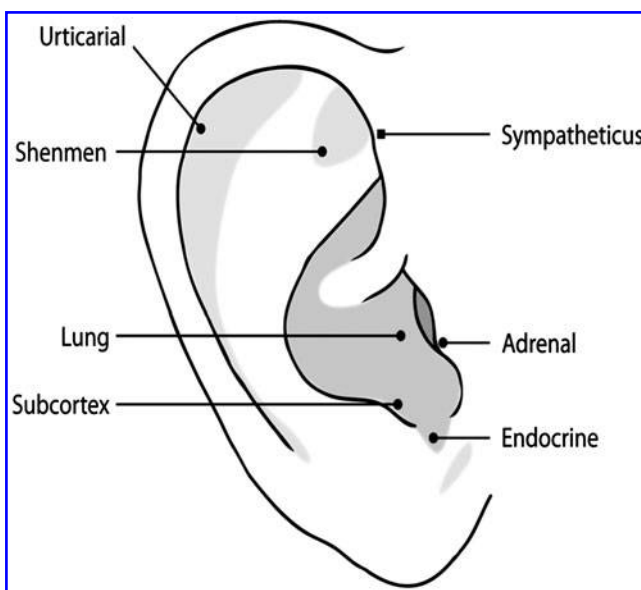


FIG. 1. Ear points for treating urticaria.

TABLE 1. ACUPUNCTURE POINTS FOR TREATING URTICARIA

Type	General points	Ear points
Acute	Basic: LI 11, SP 10, ST 36, SP 6	Lung, Endocrine, Subcortex, Shenmen, Sympathetic, Adrenals, Urticaria
Chronic	Basic plus: LI 4, BL 40, GB 20, GB 31	

TABLE 2. TCM PATTERNS IN ACUTE AND CHRONIC URTICARIA

TCM Δ	Pulse	Tongue	Points	Herbs
Wind-Heat	Superficial, rapid	Red, with yellow coat	GB 20, TH 5, ST 36, SP 4	Xiao Feng San
Wind-Cold	Superficial, slow	Thin white coat	BL 12, 13, 20 (moxa), GB 31	Gui Zhi Tang
Blood Deficiency	Thin, weak, soft	Slightly red, thin or peeled	BL 17, 20, SP 3, 4	Si Wu Tang

TCM, Traditional Chinese Medicine.

(Cinnamon Twig [Golden Flower Herbs, visit: www.gfcherbs.com]); for Blood deficiency, use Si Wu Tang (Tang Kuei and salvia [Golden Flower]);⁴ and for Lung/Spleen Qi deficiency, use Astra 8 (Health Concerns Herbs, visit: www.healthconcerns.com).

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ACUPUNCTURE CAN BE USED EFFECTIVELY to treat urticaria in more than 90% of cases,¹ potentially by regulating the elevated serum immunoglobulin E (IgE) levels that occur in this disorder.² Studies investigating abdominal acupuncture, compared to cetirizine,³ and acupuncture with point injections of thiamin, compared to antihistamines, demonstrated a better therapeutic effect and a lower relapse rate with acupuncture.⁴ In studies of chronic urticaria, patients treated with acupuncture for 3 weeks had a reduction in the number and duration of episodes compared to the placebo group.⁵

The most common Traditional Chinese Medicine diagnosis for urticaria is a pattern of Wind in the skin, but, in acute urticaria Wind-Heat predominates. Wind is often combined with Stomach and Spleen deficiencies and Dampness.⁶ The most common acupuncture points prescribed are: LI 11 (Quchi), SP 10 (Xuehai), SP 6 (San-yinjiao), and ST 36 (Zusanli).⁷ The first three points are used to clear Damp Heat, while ST 36 is used to tonify Qi and Blood. In the study that used point injections, GB 20 (Fengchi) was also used as it dispels Wind. A more recent study showed that subcutaneous needling applied to GV 11 (Shendao) with a thick acupuncture needle for 4 hours a day can also decrease serum IgE and improve urticaria symptom scores.⁸ Finally, the “surround the dragon” acupuncture technique has been shown to be effective for treating many skin conditions. Needles are inserted at small intervals subcutaneously at 25° angles to the skin around the lesions for 30 minutes. Clinicians can expect high success rates in treating urticaria using a combination of the above acupuncture treatments.

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FOR CHRONIC IDIOPATHIC URTICARIA—when causes and underlying conditions have been ruled out—it is still important to avoid proinflammatory foods and beverages^{1,2} and to minimize oxidative stress.³ Spicy foods, shellfish, foods that raise serotonin levels (banana, pineapple), alcohol, and coffee are best avoided, especially during flareups. Acupuncture can be given while the patient is still taking antihistamines,⁴ while corticosteroids should be tapered off as soon as symptoms start to abate.

In Chinese medicine the syndrome/pattern could be the result of Wind-Cold at the Wei (antipathogenic) or Ying (nutritive) levels; Wind-Heat at the Ying and Xue (Blood) levels; Wind-Dampness; or Spleen-Stomach dysfunction. With Blood Stasis and Heat, internal Wind can be generated. Treatment is directed at dispelling Wind and clearing Heat or Dampness. If the Spleen is involved, it needs to be tonified. In addition to the main acupoints of LI 11 and SP 10, GV 14 and B 17 (the influential point of Blood) can be needled; the last two points can be cupped with bloodletting to clear Heat. B 13, 18, and 20 are used according to the patient’s pattern. Other important points include B 12 for Wind, SP 6–9 for Dampness and ST 36 to tonify the Spleen. A reducing method, including cupping would be, at least initially, preferable to using a heat lamp or moxa, although heat is used for tonification.