

Research Progress of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Treatment of Postpartum Urinary Incontinence

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Abstract: *Postpartum urinary incontinence is a common pelvic floor dysfunction disease after childbirth, which seriously affects patients' quality of life and physical and mental health. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has unique advantages and significant efficacy in the treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence. This article reviews the literature on TCM therapies for postpartum urinary incontinence from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Wanfang Data from 2013 to 2025, summarizing the application and research progress of Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, moxibustion and comprehensive therapies in the treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence. The results show that TCM therapies can effectively improve pelvic floor muscle function and reduce urinary incontinence symptoms through holistic regulation and syndrome differentiation treatment, with few side effects and high patient acceptance. Future research should further conduct large-sample, multi-center clinical studies to deeply explore the mechanism of TCM in treating postpartum urinary incontinence, providing more sufficient scientific basis for clinical promotion and application.*

Keywords: Postpartum urinary incontinence, TCM therapy, Acupuncture, Pelvic floor dysfunction, Research progress.

1. Introduction

Postpartum urinary incontinence refers to the involuntary leakage of urine in women after childbirth, which is one of the main manifestations of pelvic floor dysfunction. Epidemiological survey shows that the incidence of postpartum urinary incontinence is about 30% -50%, of which the incidence rate of vaginal delivery is significantly higher than that of cesarean section [1]. With the implementation of China's "two-child" and "three-child" policies and the increasing proportion of elderly mothers, the prevention and treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence has become an important public health issue.

Traditional Chinese medicine classifies postpartum urinary incontinence as "postpartum drowning" and "urinary incontinence", and believes that its pathogenesis is mainly due to childbirth injury, kidney qi deficiency, qi sinking, or liver depression and qi stagnation, leading to bladder incontinence [2]. Modern medicine believes that damage to pelvic floor muscles, fascia, and nerves during pregnancy and childbirth is the main cause of postpartum urinary incontinence [3]. Traditional Chinese medicine has the advantages of overall regulation, syndrome differentiation and treatment, and minimal side effects in the treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence. In recent years, it has achieved significant therapeutic effects in clinical applications.

2. Progress in Traditional Chinese Medicine Treatment Research

According to traditional Chinese medicine theory, postpartum urinary incontinence is mainly related to dysfunction of the kidneys, spleen, and lungs. The kidneys regulate water and

regulate bowel movements; The spleen is responsible for promoting clarity; lung governs regulation of the waterways. Labor consumes gas and damages blood, which can easily lead to insufficient kidney qi, weak temperament, or insufficient lung qi, thereby causing urinary incontinence [4]. Common clinical syndrome types include kidney qi deficiency, spleen deficiency and qi depression, liver stagnation and qi stagnation, and qi and blood deficiency. In terms of traditional Chinese medicine treatment, classic formulas such as Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang, Xiao Quan Wan, Jin Kui Shen Qi Wan, etc. are widely used in clinical practice. Xia zhenghuan [5] used modified Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang to treat 60 patients with postpartum urinary incontinence of spleen deficiency and qi depression type, with a total effective rate of 91.7%, significantly higher than the control group's 73.3%. Research shows that this formula can improve urinary control function by enhancing pelvic floor muscle strength. Wang Jing [6] applied Suoquan Wan to treat postpartum urinary incontinence of kidney qi deficiency type and found that it not only improved clinical symptoms, but also regulated collagen metabolism indicators in patients' serum, promoting pelvic floor tissue repair.

In recent years, some new traditional Chinese medicine preparations have also shown good therapeutic effects. The total effective rate of "Sheng Xian Gu Shen granules" developed by Liquidong [7] in treating postpartum stress urinary incontinence is 87.9%, and its mechanism may be related to regulating the proportion of type I and III collagen in pelvic floor muscles. In addition, external treatments such as traditional Chinese medicine fumigation and sitz baths are often used as auxiliary treatment methods, which have the characteristics of low local stimulation and high patient compliance.

3. Research Progress of Acupuncture and Moxibustion Treatment

Acupuncture and moxibustion has unique advantages in the treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence by stimulating specific points to regulate the functions of zang fu organs and promote the movement of qi and blood. Commonly used clinical acupoints include local pelvic floor acupoints such as Guanyuan, Zhongji, Huiyang, and Baliao, as well as distal acupoints such as Zusanli and Sanyinjiao [8].

Electroacupuncture is an acupuncture and moxibustion treatment method that has been studied extensively at present. Wang Qiong [9] compared the therapeutic effects of electroacupuncture and pelvic floor muscle training on postpartum urinary incontinence, and found that the electroacupuncture group was superior to the control group in improving the ICI-Q-SF questionnaire score ($P<0.05$), and the therapeutic effect lasted longer. Functional magnetic resonance imaging studies have shown that electroacupuncture may improve urinary incontinence symptoms by regulating the activity of the brain's urinary control center [10].

Acupoint catgut embedding, as a long-term acupuncture and moxibustion stimulation method, has also shown good results in the treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence. The study by Shi Jingyi [11] showed that the total effective rate of acupoint embedding combined with Kegel exercise in treating postpartum urinary incontinence was 92.5%, significantly higher than the 77.5% of the Kegel exercise group alone ($P<0.05$). Thread embedding therapy can avoid frequent needle punctures, improve patient compliance, and is particularly suitable for postpartum breastfeeding women.

4. Research Progress on Moxibustion and Other Therapies

Moxibustion therapy stimulates acupoints with warmth, which has the effects of warming meridians, unblocking collaterals, and nourishing qi and blood. It is particularly suitable for postpartum urinary incontinence patients with qi and blood deficiency. Clinical common methods such as ginger separated moxibustion and warm acupuncture and moxibustion are applied to Guanyuan, Qihai and other acupoints [12]. Yu Zhenling [13] used salt separated moxibustion at the Shenque acupoint to treat postpartum stress urinary incontinence. The results showed that the total effective rate of the moxibustion group was 87.5%, and the pelvic floor muscle voltage of the patients was significantly increased. Modern research has shown that the thermal effect of moxibustion can promote local blood circulation and accelerate pelvic floor tissue repair [14].

In addition to the above methods, therapies such as massage and acupoint application are often used as auxiliary treatment methods. Comprehensive therapies such as acupuncture and moxibustion combined with traditional Chinese medicine, moxibustion combined with pelvic floor muscle training can often achieve better results. The research of Sun Mingsheng [15] shows that the total effective rate of oral Chinese medicine combined with acupuncture and moxibustion in the

treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence is significantly higher than that of the monotherapy group.

5. Problems and Prospects

Although traditional Chinese medicine has made significant progress in treating postpartum urinary incontinence, there are still some problems: (1) the sample size of clinical studies is generally small, and there is a lack of large sample, multi center randomized controlled trials; (2) The evaluation criteria for therapeutic efficacy are not unified, and there is a lack of objective and quantitative evaluation indicators; (3) Insufficient in-depth research on the mechanism of action and inadequate application of modern science and technology; (4) Long term follow-up data is lacking, and the duration of therapeutic effect maintenance needs to be observed.

Future research should focus on the following directions: (1) establishing a standardized TCM syndrome differentiation and efficacy evaluation system; (2) Objective evaluation of pelvic floor function improvement using modern technological means such as ultrasound, electromyography, etc; (3) Conduct basic research and delve into the molecular mechanisms of traditional Chinese medicine in treating postpartum urinary incontinence; (4) Optimize treatment plans and develop personalized and precise traditional Chinese medicine treatment strategies; (5) Strengthen prevention research and explore the role of traditional Chinese medicine in primary prevention of postpartum urinary incontinence.

6. Summary

The treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence with traditional Chinese medicine has the advantages of definite curative effect, small side effects, high patient acceptance, and has formed a comprehensive treatment system of oral Chinese medicine, acupuncture and moxibustion, moxibustion, and so on. Existing evidence suggests that traditional Chinese medicine therapy can improve pelvic floor function and reduce urinary incontinence symptoms through multiple targets and pathways. In the future, high-quality clinical research should be strengthened to clarify the mechanism of action and provide more comprehensive scientific basis for the promotion and application of traditional Chinese medicine in the prevention and treatment of postpartum urinary incontinence.

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