

Acupuncture Point Selection Strategies for Treating Hyperhidrosis.

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Abstract: *Hyperhidrosis is a condition defined by excessive sweating caused by various underlying factors, and it is commonly encountered in clinical practice. It may occur alone or as a symptom associated with other diseases, and is closely linked to the functions of the five organs as well as the metabolism of Qi, blood, and bodily fluids. This article summarizes relevant literature regarding acupuncture treatment for hyperhidrosis, focusing on aspects such as external and internal factors, deficiency and excess conditions, the interplay between nutritive and defensive Qi, Qi and blood dynamics, organ systems, and experiential point selection. Additionally, it discusses initial strategies for point selection, highlighting the importance of syndrome differentiation in clinical practice. The initial step should be to identify the Yin and Yang to understand the fundamental principles, followed by a comprehensive evaluation of symptoms in relation to organ systems, superficial and deep layers, cold and heat conditions, and deficiency and excess. This approach allows for flexible prescribing aimed at harmonizing Yin and Yang.*

Keywords: Hyperhidrosis, Acupuncture, Acupoint.

1. Introduction

Hyperhidrosis (HH) refers to an excessive secretion of sweat that exceeds the body's needs for thermoregulation and homeostasis, leading to abnormal sweating [1]. It can be classified into primary and secondary types. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), hyperhidrosis falls under the category of "sweating disorders." This condition can significantly impact both physical and mental health and can disrupt daily activities and work performance. In modern Western medicine, the treatment of hyperhidrosis is mainly focused on pharmacological interventions [2] and surgical procedures [3]. However, both approaches are associated with varying degrees of side effects, and in some cases, compensatory hyperhidrosis may develop, where sweating is reduced at the treated site but increases in other areas [4]. Currently, no widely accepted solution exists to fully address this issue. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) offers a diverse range of therapeutic approaches, including herbal medicine, acupuncture, moxibustion, and cupping therapy. Among these modalities, acupuncture has gained attention for the treatment of hyperhidrosis due to its simplicity, safety profile, minimal adverse effects, and notable therapeutic outcomes. These characteristics make it highly suitable for extensive clinical application, and the following is a concise summary of its use.

2. Etiology and Pathomechanism

Hyperhidrosis is a disorder primarily marked by an excessive release of sweat. According to Western medical theory, hyperactivity of the sympathetic nervous system is considered the leading factor contributing to this condition [5]. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), it is believed that "sweat is the fluid of the heart." However, according to the classic text *Feng Shi Zhi Yao*: "Excessive food and drink lead to sweating from the stomach, fright and essence loss cause sweating from the heart, carrying heavy burdens or long-distance walking results in sweating from the kidneys, running or fear triggers sweating from the liver, and physical

exhaustion causes sweating from the spleen." This illustrates that dysfunctions in all five organs can lead to excessive sweating, rather than the heart alone. Sweat is a byproduct of the metabolism of body fluids. Within the body, these fluids are stored as liquids, rise as "jin," descend as urine, and are excreted as sweat. The generation, distribution, and excretion of these fluids require the coordinated functioning of multiple organs. The specific relationships are outlined as follows: The heart is linked to sweat, with heart essence and heart blood serving as the primary sources for its production. The liver is responsible for the smooth flow of Qi, and when Qi circulates properly, the distribution of body fluids is unobstructed. The spleen oversees blood and plays a crucial role in transformation; together with the stomach, it forms the foundation of postnatal life, converting the essence of food into Qi, blood, and body fluids, while also facilitating their transport throughout the body. It is essential for maintaining the normal function of these fluids, as "the blood of the five organs and six bowels depends on the regulation of spleen Qi." The lungs regulate the body's functions and control the water pathways; they are connected to the skin, with their manifestations appearing in the hair. The sweat pores, known as "Xuan Fu," serve as the portals for sweat excretion. The dispersing and descending functions of lung Qi promote and regulate the distribution and excretion of body fluids. The kidneys, as the water organ, play a vital role in overseeing and regulating the metabolism of body fluids. The primary causes of hyperhidrosis include chronic illness, emotional imbalances, and irregular dietary habits. The underlying pathogenesis is characterized by an imbalance of yin and yang, leading to dysregulated sweating due to weakened protective barriers.

3. Treatment Strategies of Acupuncture for Hyperhidrosis

3.1 Syndrome Differentiation and Acupoint Selection

3.1.1 Differentiation of External Pathogenic Factors and Internal Injuries

According to Yu Hexuan's [6] summary of clinical experience with acupoint selection for hyperhidrosis, sweating resulting from external pathogenic factors can be treated by needling the Kunlun point to warm and tonify, yielding therapeutic effects similar to those of Gui Zhi Decoction. In cases of internal injury, such as yin deficiency leading to night sweats or yang deficiency resulting in persistent spontaneous sweating, moxibustion performed after reinforcing treatment at the Dazhui point can effectively stop sweating.

3.1.2 Differentiation of Deficiency and Excess

Liu Zhe [7] suggests that for deficiency syndromes, the focus should be on nourishing blood, benefiting Qi, strengthening the protective barrier, and stopping sweating by selecting the acupoints Lieque, Zhao Hai, Hegu, Sanyinjiao, Ge Shu, Fei Shu, and Zusanli. For excess syndromes, the treatment should aim to clear heat and nourish yin while also reinforcing the protective barrier and stopping sweating, using the acupoints Hegu, Fulu, Houxi, Taichong, Dazhui, Neiting, Waiguan, and Yinlingquan. In cases of simultaneous Qi and Yin deficiency, Zhao Jiayong [8], Li Hongzhang [9], and others agree that the primary acupoints should be Yinxi and Fulu, employing a reinforcing technique. In cases of yin deficiency with excess heat, Yu Yanqin [10] selects Hegu, Fulu, Zusanli, Yinlingquan, and Taixi as the primary acupoints using a reinforcing technique, supplemented by Sanyinjiao, Dazhui, and Quchi, with Dazhui and Quchi employing a draining technique.

3.1.3 Differentiation of Ying and Wei

In cases of disharmony between Ying and Wei, Sun Lei [11] suggests selecting the Huatuo Jiaji points, Zusanli, Sanyinjiao, Hegu, and Fulu to harmonize the yin and yang of the organs, ultimately achieving a balance between Ying and Wei. In instances of Wei Yang deficiency, Ouyang Xinyi and colleagues [12] argue that the Bladder Meridian of the Foot Taiyang, being the meridian with the broadest coverage of the body's surface, regulates the exterior, coordinates Ying and Wei, and facilitates bladder Qi transformation while harmonizing the organs. Needling the back Shu points can regulate the functions of the five organs and six bowels. Furthermore, the stimulation of these back Shu points is closely linked to the spinal nerves and sympathetic nervous system, thereby helping to regulate the autonomic nervous system (ANS). Dysregulation of the sympathetic nervous system is a primary contributing factor to hyperhidrosis.

3.1.4 Differentiation of Qi and Blood

In cases of Qi deficiency, Li Yingji [13] recommends selecting the Hegu and Taichong points and employing techniques such as lifting, thrusting, twisting, and reinforcing. These two points symbolize one for Qi and one for blood, one representing yang and the other yin, as well as one for ascending and one for descending functions. This approach promotes coordination in ascending and descending processes, ensures the harmonious interaction of yin and yang, and collectively aids in regulating the organs, balancing yin and yang, and facilitating the smooth flow of Qi and blood. As a result, this harmonizes Ying and Wei, benefits Qi, and strengthens the protective barrier, allowing sweating to

subside naturally. In cases of concurrent Qi and blood deficiency, Lin Xijia [14] suggests selecting Zusanli, Hegu, Fulu, Guanyuan, Dazhui, and Shen Shu points, along with moxibustion therapy.

3.1.5 Differentiation of Zang and Fu

In cases of heart yang deficiency, Ouyang Qun [15] suggests that hyperhidrosis associated with this condition should include the selection of Xin Shu (Heart Shu), Neiguan, Zusanli, Hegu, and Fulu points. For kidney deficiency, Wu Junjun [16] posits that hyperhidrosis relates to both kidney yang and yin deficiency. The main acupoints for this condition are Shen Shu (Kidney Shu), Guanyuan, Houxi, and Hegu. Treatment should be further differentiated based on specific symptoms: if there is instability of lung Wei, include Fei Shu (Lung Shu), Fengmen, and Qihai; for Ying and Wei disharmony, add Qihai, Lieque, and Dazhui; if yin deficiency is accompanied by excess heat, incorporate Taixi and Yongquan; if pathogenic heat is obstructing, add Taichong and Rangu; for dampness accumulation, include Pi Shu (Spleen Shu) and Wei Shu (Stomach Shu); and if Qi and blood are deficient, add Pi Shu, Zusanli, and Sanyinjiao. In cases of excessive heart and liver fire combined with insufficient kidney yin, Ji Rong [17] suggests that treatment should focus on nourishing water to support the liver, selecting acupoints such as Xin Shu (Heart Shu), Gan Shu (Liver Shu), Dan Shu (Gallbladder Shu), Shen Shu (Kidney Shu), Neiguan, Shendmen, Taixi, Taichong, Guilai, and Zigong. For conditions of insufficient kidney yin and excessive heart fire, Li Chuanqi [18] recommends nourishing yin and clearing heat to establish a connection between the heart and kidneys, utilizing Shenmen for draining and Fulu for reinforcement. In instances of spleen and kidney yang deficiency along with Wei instability, Wang Yang [19] advocates the use of Fulu, Hegu, Zusanli, Guanyuan, Mingmen, Shen Shu, Taixi, Taichong, and Shenmen to tonify both the spleen and kidneys, regulate Ying, control sweating, and promote the smooth flow of Qi.

3.2 Experience in Point Selection

3.2.1 Hegu-Fulu Pairing

Historically, many medical practitioners have commonly chosen the combination of Hegu and Fulu points to treat hyperhidrosis. Recent data mining studies have confirmed that this pairing exerts a bidirectional regulatory effect on hyperhidrosis. However, there is significant debate among practitioners regarding the methods of supplementation and draining to achieve this effect. The approaches can generally be categorized into three main strategies [20]: "draining Hegu while reinforcing Fulu," "reinforcing Fulu without specific techniques for Hegu," and "simultaneously reinforcing both Hegu and Fulu."

3.2.2 Needling Method for Sweating Control

Lu Huirong's [21] approach to managing hyperhidrosis is based on the pathogenesis of heart and spleen deficiency. She proposes a needling prescription consisting of Hegu, Fulu, Zusanli, and Jianshi points. This treatment strategy is grounded in solid theoretical principles, and its clinical

effectiveness has been clearly demonstrated.

3.2.3 Needling Method for Calming the Mind

Lü Shanshan [22] emphasizes her teacher's concept of "calming the mind." She selects points such as Baihui, Shenting, and Yintang to regulate the spirit of the brain, acknowledging that "the brain is the abode of the original spirit." To calm the heart and spirit, she uses Shenmen and Neiguan points. Furthermore, she incorporates Hegu and Taichong to open the four gates, promoting the circulation of Qi and blood throughout the body. This comprehensive approach aims to achieve a calming effect through acupuncture.

3.2.4 Taiyi Needling Method

Luo Chenglin [23] employs the Taiyi needling method by first selecting the Jiuwei and Bopeng points to cultivate the original Qi and regulate the flow of Qi. He then utilizes Tianshu, Daju, and Taiyi points from the Foot Yangming Stomach meridian to harmonize Yin and Yang and adjust the upward and downward movements of Qi. Finally, he flexibly selects corresponding original points based on the differentiation of internal organs.

3.2.5 Needling Method for Supporting Zheng and Eliminating Pathogenic Factors

Chen Huanjun [24] posits that hyperhidrosis is caused by mental strain and Yin deficiency, leading to an imbalance of Yin and Yang in the internal organs. This imbalance results in Yang deficiency manifesting outwardly, Qi stagnation, and a deficiency of both Qi and blood. To address this, he selects points including Shenmen, Taixi, Fuliu, Neiguan, Taichong, Taiyuan, Sanyinjiao, Hegu, Fengchi, and Benshen. Additionally, he employs warming acupuncture on Fuliu to enhance the reinforcing effect on Yang.

3.2.6 Needling Method for Regulating the Governing Vessel and Calming the Mind

Cao Yi [25] asserts that the Governing Vessel is responsible for regulating the Yang Qi throughout the body. He focuses on Baihui, Shenting, and Shenmen points to regulate the heart spirit and calm the mind, thereby stabilizing emotional well-being.

4. Selection of Acupuncture Points by Various Physicians

4.1 Focus on the Combined Use of Fuliu and Hegu

Both Fuliu and Hegu points exhibit bidirectional regulatory effects on hyperhidrosis; however, there is significant debate among practitioners regarding the methods for reinforcing or reducing these effects. In particular, opinions on the techniques used for Hegu in the context of hyperhidrosis vary greatly, whereas there is a more consistent agreement on the use of reinforcing techniques for Fuliu in treating this condition. Some practitioners suggest [26][27][28][29] that for hyperhidrosis, a reducing technique should be applied at Hegu and a reinforcing technique at Fuliu. This

recommendation is based on the observation that patients typically exhibit a pattern of Yin deficiency and Yang excess. Hegu is the source point of the Hand Yangming Large Intestine Meridian and is associated with Yang; therefore, employing a reducing technique here helps to clear heat. In contrast, Fuliu, located on the Foot Shaoyin Kidney Meridian, is associated with Yin; using a reinforcing technique at this point aims to tonify Kidney Qi and nourish Yin. The interplay between these two points—representing the duality of Yin and Yang—facilitates both the dissipation of excess heat and the reinforcement of bodily functions, effectively contributing to the alleviation of excessive sweating. Another group of practitioners posits [24] that it is unnecessary to apply specific reinforcing or reducing techniques at Hegu; simply achieving Qi at this point is sufficient. For patients whose hyperhidrosis stems from Yin damage that causes Yang to become deficient and escape outward, they advocate for using a reinforcing technique at Fuliu to nourish Yin. Since Yin and Yang are interdependent, while the patient displays signs of Yin deficiency, their Yang energy is also depleting, resulting in a relative excess of Yang. Therefore, simply focusing on obtaining Qi at Hegu is considered adequate for treatment. Some practitioners assert [10][15][30] that Hegu and Fuliu should both be utilized with reinforcing techniques. Patients with hyperhidrosis of this nature typically exhibit a condition characterized by deficiencies in both Yin and Yang. By employing reinforcing techniques at both points, a balance between Yin and Yang can be achieved, resulting in the effects of nourishing Yin, restraining Yang, alleviating deficient heat, and ultimately reducing sweating.

4.2 Emphasis on Zangfu Differentiation

A review of the relevant literature reveals that different syndromes can often exhibit overlapping characteristics. Beyond Zangfu differentiation, traces of this concept can also be found in various other differentiation methods and point selections. For instance, the method for restraining sweating is based on the Heart and Spleen, the Taiyi acupuncture method focuses on the Spleen and Stomach, and the calming acupuncture method emphasizes the Heart. Hyperhidrosis primarily arises from an imbalance of Yin and Yang, and dysfunctions in any of the five organs can contribute to this imbalance, leading to increased sweating. The Heart is responsible for housing blood internally and regulating sweat externally. Excessive Heart fire can lead to sweating even when the pores are tightly closed, while inadequate pore closure and insufficient Heart fire can also result in sweating. Some patients experience sweating in the heart region due to excessive worrying, which depletes Heart blood and allows Heart fire to burn bodily fluids, causing a loss of Heart fluid that manifests as sweat. Since Heart fluid is essential for nourishing the fluids of the five organs and six bowels, it is not appropriate to clear Heart fire in this case; instead, it is better to nourish the blood and support the Heart. Additionally, the modern environment and increasing psychological stress contribute to a lack of nourishment for the Heart spirit. Therefore, the acupoints Shenmen and Neiguan [22] are selected for treatment. Shenmen helps calm the Heart and stabilize the spirit, while Neiguan, belonging to the Pericardium channel, acts as a protective barrier for the Heart against pathogens. Together, these acupoints effectively nourish the Heart spirit. Excessive sweating associated with

liver disease is commonly linked to liver stagnation, liver deficiency, and liver blood stasis [31]. The smooth flow of liver qi is crucial for regulating the body's overall qi dynamics; when this flow is obstructed, it can result in stagnation and stasis. Liver stagnation may generate heat, which can lead to sweating through a vaporizing effect. For example, when someone runs quickly or experiences fear, sweating can occur as a response linked to the liver. Fear tends to deplete yin blood, leading to liver blood deficiency. When liver blood is insufficient, it fails to nourish the body, which allows deficient fire to rise, disrupting the body's normal regulatory functions and causing sweating. For cases of excess, acupoints such as Tai Chong should be selected [32], while for deficiency cases, back shu points should be employed. The spleen and stomach serve as the foundation of life after birth and are the source of qi and blood production. Sweat and blood share the same origin, making the spleen and stomach central to the treatment of hyperhidrosis [33]. In a state of hunger, the gastric fire is localized in the chest and diaphragm, and does not ascend to the head and neck. When food is ingested, the Yang of the stomach rises, transforming into sweat that is released from the head, face, and neck [34]. In such cases, it is important to nourish Yin and reduce sweating, as the presence of excess Yang suggests a deficiency of Yin. By nourishing Yin, its strength can counterbalance Yang, thereby stopping the sweating. Additionally, if sweating occurs in the hands and feet, the underlying issue is related to the stomach. The spleen, which is associated with the flesh and governs the four limbs, can also be implicated. When heat from the spleen and stomach reaches the muscle layer, it results in body sweating; when it extends to the limbs, it causes sweating in the hands and feet, known as heat sweat. However, when the spleen and stomach are deficient and cold, fluids cannot be transformed properly, and cold Yin can constrain the Yang, leading to sweating in the muscles and limbs, which is classified as cold sweat. Acupuncture points such as Zhongwan, Xiabiao, Qihai, Guanyuan, and Tianshu are selected to regulate the spleen and stomach, thereby restoring their proper function [24]. The lungs regulate the dispersion of Qi, enabling the distribution of defensive Qi and body fluids, including sweat, to the skin and hair. The regulation of defensive Qi determines the occurrence of sweating, and the ability of the pores to open and close depends entirely on the status of the defensive Qi. Conditions such as lung Qi deficiency and lung fluid deficiency can compromise the integrity of the defensive barrier, leading to excessive sweating. Consequently, acupuncture points such as Lung Shu, Fengmen, and Qihai are selected for treatment [16]. Sweat is a form of body fluid, and the kidneys regulate the metabolism of fluids. However, the kidneys are responsible for storage, and fluid metabolism typically occurs through excretion from below. Thus, why does sweating occur? The depletion of kidney essence leads to insufficient kidney water. When the fire within the kidneys lacks adequate water for regulation, it causes the Yang to rise. The true fire within the kidneys then evaporates, and when it encounters the skin's pores, it manifests as sweat. Initially, sweating may occur only occasionally, but over time, it gradually intensifies. The kidneys are responsible for storage, and any deficiency in either Yin or Yang can lead to sweating. Therefore, acupuncture points such as Shenshu, Guanyuan, Houshu, and Hegu are selected as primary points to tonify the kidneys and secure the exterior. It is believed that Shenshu and Guanyuan

can jointly regulate both Yin and Yang within the kidneys, while needling Hegu and Houshu can help regulate Qi and blood, promote the flow of Qi and blood in the meridians, and adjust the opening and closing of the skin.

5. Conclusion

Excessive sweating may present as an independent symptom or as an associated symptom of other diseases. While the accompanying conditions may differ in terms of cold, heat, deficiency, and excess, the combination of Hegu (LI4) and Fuliu (KD7) should be the primary acupoints for treatment. Clinical practice should not be overly reliant on ancient texts or be constrained by literal interpretations. Professor Liu Ying [35] emphasizes that Hegu (LI4) and Fuliu (KD7) are not merely acupoints for regulating sweating; they also exemplify the balance of yin and yang. Hegu is associated with yang, promoting the expulsion of pathogenic factors while harmonizing the nutritive and defensive Qi to strengthen the exterior and control sweating. In contrast, Fuliu is associated with yin, nourishing the kidneys and promoting body fluids while regulating sweating. It expels pathogenic factors without harming yin fluids and helps clear excess heat due to deficiency. This approach should adhere to the principles of syndrome differentiation and treatment, allowing for flexible application. Highlighting the role of Shenmen (HT7) and Neiguan (PC6) in nurturing the heart and mind [36], as any imbalance in the yin and yang of the heart can lead to sweating. While it is acknowledged that diseases of the five organs can also cause sweating, it is particularly significant to note that "sweat is considered the fluid of the heart," indicating a close relationship between sweating and cardiac function. Focusing on the regulation of Qi, this can involve pairing Hegu (LI4) with Taichong (LR3) to stimulate the flow of Qi and harmonize the body's Qi and blood, or it can entail addressing the ascending and descending functions of the spleen and stomach in the middle Jiao. "Sweat is the result of Yang's influence on Yin." The evaporation of heat causes the leakage of bodily fluids, which manifests as sweat. Sweating indicates an imbalance of Yin and Yang in the body and reflects a conflict between the body's healthy and pathogenic forces. This condition may present as a deficiency of either "healthy Yang" or "healthy Yin," and it can also involve an excess of "pathogenic Yang" or "pathogenic Yin." [37] In syndrome differentiation and treatment, it is evident that sweating occurs only when heat is present, regardless of whether it is excess or deficiency heat. Therefore, when diagnosing and treating, it is crucial to identify the source of the "heat" causing the sweating. For cases of excess heat, such as damp-heat accumulation, intense liver fire, or excess heat in the Yangming, focus on acupoints with draining effects, such as Tai Chong, Da Zhui, Nei Ting, and Qu Chi. In contrast, for deficiency heat, including Qi deficiency, heart and kidney deficiency, or spleen and stomach deficiency, the emphasis should be on acupoints that provide reinforcement, such as the Back Shu points, Zu San Li, Guan Yuan, Qi Hai, Bai Hui, and Tai Xi. If blood stasis is involved, include Xue Hai and Ge Shu; if dampness is present, add Yin Ling Quan; and if there is food stagnation, incorporate Tian Shu [38].

This study examines the principles of acupuncture point selection for excessive sweating across various syndrome types and offers preliminary insights into acupuncture

strategies for its treatment. The essence of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) lies in the differentiation of syndromes and targeted treatment. Emphasis should be placed on identifying the syndrome type while leveraging a holistic approach. Initially, practitioners should distinguish between yin and yang to understand the core issue, followed by a detailed analysis of the symptoms in terms of organs, exterior and interior, cold and heat, and deficiency and excess. This allows for flexible prescriptions aimed at achieving a harmonious balance between yin and yang.

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