

## Why is it important to have a healthy spine?

The spine is the body's main support structure and plays a part in our everyday life. We need the spine to be in a good working order, so we can walk, sit, bend, move and twist while we do our everyday activity. Our spine consists of three main parts: the cervical (neck), thoracic (chest) and lumbar (lower back).

Having disorders in the spine can directly affect the rest of the body. Spinal disorders can cause problems in the blood circulation around the body, as well as loss of sensation, muscle spasm and impairment in the nervous system. To prevent developing spinal related problems/disorders, it is important to look after your spine, especially the cervical spine. When your spine is functioning well, your overall health in general will also be healthy.

A lot of spinal problems are caused by muscle tension. It is important that you keep muscles around the spine, especially the cervical spine area in a good condition. The cervical spine plays an important role in carrying signals between the brain and the rest of the body. It helps to support the head and its movements. The cervical spine also has a role in carrying blood to the brain. Keeping your head up and in a raised position is a good practice to prevent damages to the cervical spine. If you look after your cervical spine well, the rest of your spine will also be in a good position.

*Here are some images of typical changes in the cervical curvature:*



**Picture 1**



**Picture 2**



**Picture 3**



**Picture 4**

**Picture 1** shows a normal typical cervical spine position. The "cervical arch" can be seen.

**Picture 2** shows a cervical spine in an overextension position.

**Picture 3** shows there is scoliosis present in the cervical spine

**Picture 4** shows an MRI scan, we can see some abnormalities in the curvature of the cervical spine. This abnormality is beginning to affect the spinal cord and its functions.

Cervical spine disorders often affect patients between the ages of 25 and 65 years old. Office and computer workers have a high chance of developing cervical spinal disorders. It is caused by wear and tear in the bones and muscles, leading to dislocation/degeneration of disc in the neck area. Individuals with cervical spine disorder often have neck and shoulder pain. Some may experience headaches starting from the back of the neck. Some patients may also experience pain or numbness in the limb and fingers. As mentioned above, a poor cervical spine can affect an individual's daily life and it is important to look after it well.

### **How acupuncture can help to treat cervical spine disorders?**

There are different ways Traditional Chinese Medicine can treat cervical spine disorders. These include acupuncture and Tui Na (a traditional Chinese medical massage). Research have found that acupuncture have been highly effective in treating cervical spine disorders.

Acupuncture can help to treat cervical spine disorders by inserting fine needles into certain acu-points to promote qi and improve blood circulation around the body. Acupuncture can help to refresh the mind, deliver blood to the brain, stimulate nerve functions and relieve pain. Tui Na on the other hand, can help patients to relax their body and mind during the massage treatment. At the beginning of the massage, the massage therapist will aim to relax the soft tissue near the neck and shoulder area. Slowly, they will then work into the deep tissue areas and their aim is to promote qi and improve blood circulation around the body.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, pain is caused by lack of qi and poor blood circulation in the body. In order to be in good health, you need the qi and blood to flow adequately around the body. Any blockages to these will lead to pain. Acupuncture and Tui Na can help to ease the pain



associated with cervical spine disorders. It also helps to promote qi and blood around the body to where it is needed most.

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### **A patient's story:**

*I am a computer programmer and office worker, who does little regular exercise. Around two weeks ago, I started to have headache, eye pain, swollen eyes and poor blood circulation. I couldn't open my eye and it started twitching. At the beginning, I thought it was due to covid-19 or brain damage. I was going to book an appointment to see the doctor or optician, but had to wait for a long time for the next available appointment. So, I decided to try Chinese Medicine instead and see if they can find out what the problem was. I didn't expect too much, but I know Chinese Medicine can at least find out the underlying cause of my symptoms.*

*As I went for the acupuncture treatment, I was told that there was a problem in my cervical spine, which has affected the flow of blood going to my brain and other specific areas. It has caused a lot of blockages around my body and qi was not flowing smoothly. In the first treatment, I had bloodletting, this helped to reduce the blood pressure in my affected eye. After the treatment, I could open my eye properly again. It seemed to have reduced my headaches as well as I was not getting them regularly like before.*

*Obviously, the first treatment didn't heal everything, I did get headaches from time to time. But I noticed some differences, the headaches didn't seem to come from the eye anymore. I could feel it was coming more from the neck area, poor blood flow seems to be affecting the surrounding nerves. I could tell this was the case as when I massage certain areas on my head, the pain starts to reduce. For my second and the next couple of treatments, the acupuncture was focused on strengthening my cervical spine. The acupuncture has reduced my headaches sufficiently as it has helped to promote the flow of blood in my body. I have been advised that I need to have ongoing treatments to heal my cervical spine.*

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