

Research Progress on External Nursing Techniques of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Prevention and Treatment of Functional Constipation in the Elderly (Postprint)

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Abstract

Elderly functional constipation severely impacts patients' quality of life. This paper reviews the research progress in recent years on external nursing techniques of traditional Chinese medicine for the prevention and treatment of elderly functional constipation, aiming to provide references for clinical nursing care of elderly functional constipation and promote the development of external nursing techniques of traditional Chinese medicine.

Full Text

Title

Research Progress of Traditional Chinese Medicine External Nursing Techniques in the Prevention and Treatment of Functional Constipation in the Elderly

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Abstract

Functional constipation seriously impacts the quality of life of elderly patients. This paper summarizes recent research progress on the application of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) external nursing techniques in the prevention and treatment of functional constipation in the elderly, aiming to provide references for clinical nursing practice and promote the development of TCM external nursing techniques.

Keywords: functional constipation; elderly patients; TCM external application; TCM nursing techniques; massage; auricular acupoint sticking and pressing; TCM enema

Introduction

Functional constipation in the elderly is caused by weakened intestinal transmission function, reduced colonic mucosal response to fecal peristalsis stimulation, and diminished defecation reflex [1], with main clinical manifestations including difficult defecation, dry and hard stool, and prolonged defecation time. In recent years, the incidence of functional constipation in the elderly has shown an upward trend. Studies have shown that over 20% of elderly people in China suffer from this condition [2]. Long-term constipation in the elderly is often accompanied by complications such as anorectal diseases and cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, which can seriously endanger patients' lives [3]. Western medicine treatment primarily uses laxatives and prokinetic agents, which easily lead to dependence [4]. TCM treatment for functional constipation in the elderly has a long history, including internal herbal medicine, acupoint plastering, massage, auricular acupressure, and other nursing techniques that provide holistic regulation with fewer adverse reactions and high tolerance [5-6]. With the development of TCM, TCM nursing techniques are increasingly applied in clinical practice. This paper focuses on the application of TCM external nursing techniques in elderly functional constipation.

1. Pathogenesis of Functional Constipation in the Elderly from a TCM Perspective

TCM classifies functional constipation in the elderly into excess syndrome, deficiency syndrome, and mixed deficiency-excess syndrome. Excess syndrome constipation is primarily caused by emotional distress, greasy diet, alcohol and tobacco consumption, combined with external pathogenic factors. Deficiency syndrome mainly results from age-related weakness, chronic illness, dietary fatigue, and exposure to cold-dampness, which injures the spleen and stomach. The etiology of functional constipation in the elderly is complex, with various patterns transforming or coexisting. The primary disease location is the large intestine, and the pathomechanism involves the spleen, stomach, lung, kidney, and liver [1]. Spleen deficiency leads to impaired transportation and transformation, preventing the distribution of nutrients and the movement of waste to the large intestine. Lung deficiency causes abnormal diffusion and descent; since the lung and large intestine are interior-exteriorly related, the large intestine's qi movement becomes obstructed. Emotional distress and anger cause liver qi stagnation, impairing its dispersing function and leading to spleen-stomach dysfunction. The kidney opens at the two yin orifices; when kidney essence is deficient, the large intestine loses its moistening function, resulting in dry stool. As recorded in *Yi Guan · Xie Li Bing Da Bian Bu Tong*: "The ability of the large intestine to open and close is controlled by the kidney." Thus, large in-

testine dysfunction is the branch manifestation, while the root cause lies in the dysfunction of the five zang organs.

2. Research Progress of TCM External Nursing Techniques in Elderly Functional Constipation

Currently, TCM external nursing techniques for treating functional constipation in the elderly are applied individually or in combination, including auricular acupressure, acupoint plastering, moxibustion, acupoint massage, and combined applications such as acupoint massage with acupoint plastering, or acupoint massage with auricular acupressure [2].

2.1 Herbal Enema Therapy

Herbal enema has a long history, high drug utilization, and good safety. The application of enema for constipation can be traced back to the *Shang Han Lun*, and the *Wai Tai Mi Yao* also documented herbal enema methods: “For constipation, use pig bile mixed with a little honey, simmer in a pot until thick, form into date-sized pills, insert into the lower orifice, and the condition will be resolved.” Due to age-related functional decline, elderly patients with functional constipation often experience indigestion, abdominal distension, and poor appetite, with low tolerance for oral medication, leading to persistent constipation that cannot be effectively improved [7]. In a study by Zhou Haijuan [8], 60 elderly patients with functional constipation received enema intervention with significant results. Rectal administration allows the medicinal fluid to directly contact the large intestine lesion, effectively exerting therapeutic effects. Additionally, through permeation and absorption, the medicine regulates abdominal qi, and when qi flows smoothly, symptoms such as indigestion and abdominal distension can be improved, thereby regulating the qi mechanism of the whole body’s zang-fu organs. The advantages of this nursing technique lie in its simplicity, low cost, and rapid effect, making it an efficient TCM external nursing method.

2.2 Auricular Acupressure

Auricular points connect to the zang-fu organs through meridians; therefore, stimulating auricular points can achieve therapeutic effects for constipation. Chen Ying [9] conducted a nursing effect analysis of auricular acupressure on 60 elderly patients with functional constipation, showing an effective rate of 93.3%, significantly superior to the oral phenolphthalein tablet group, demonstrating that auricular acupressure has remarkable clinical effects and is suitable for clinical promotion. Ding Weiqun et al. [10] studied patients with functional constipation due to long-term bed rest after cerebral infarction sequelae, showing that the effective rate with auricular therapy was higher than conventional treatment, indicating that combined auricular acupressure can effectively improve constipation symptoms. All these studies selected the large intestine point and

constipation point for treatment, demonstrating that stimulating these points can promote intestinal peristalsis and regulate intestinal function to relieve constipation. Some scholars believe that stimulating the sympathetic point can regulate autonomic nervous function and cerebral cortex, enhancing defecation excitability; the triple burner point can promote transportation and transformation, significantly improving constipation symptoms [11]. Therefore, in clinical practice, multiple points can be stimulated simultaneously based on pattern differentiation to strengthen meridian unblocking and zang-fu qi regulation for constipation prevention and treatment.

2.3 Combined Applications of TCM External Nursing Techniques

2.3.1 Acupoint Massage Combined with Acupoint Plastering The combination of acupoint massage and acupoint plastering can improve drug utilization and enhance therapeutic effects. Cai Junping et al. [12] conducted clinical observations of acupoint plastering combined with acupoint pressing in 60 elderly patients with functional constipation, showing that the combined application of these two external therapies improved patients' constipation. Liu Zhiying et al. [13] treated 60 elderly patients with functional constipation using acupoint plastering combined with acupoint massage, resulting in significantly reduced defecation difficulty and effective treatment of functional constipation. The combination achieves dual effects of acupoint stimulation and medication. Acupoint massage increases local skin temperature, enhancing drug permeability while strengthening acupoint stimulation, thereby improving therapeutic efficacy for elderly functional constipation. This method is simple, convenient, and worthy of clinical promotion.

2.3.2 Acupoint Massage Combined with Auricular Acupressure Acupoint massage and auricular acupressure stimulate body points to unblock meridians and regulate zang-fu function, thereby relieving constipation symptoms. Dai Hong [14] et al. conducted a meta-analysis of TCM external nursing techniques in elderly constipation patients from 2015-2019, concluding that combined techniques are superior to single applications. Xu Huan [15] divided 90 elderly patients with functional constipation into groups receiving abdominal massage alone, auricular acupressure alone, or combined abdominal massage with auricular acupressure, showing that the combined application had significantly higher total effective rate than single applications. Abdominal acupoint massage directly acts on the gastrointestinal tract, accelerating peristalsis and excretion, while auricular acupressure stimulates auricular reaction points to unblock meridians, regulate zang-fu organs, and balance autonomic nerves for holistic regulation. Combining local and systemic approaches better improves therapeutic efficacy for elderly functional constipation. Lu Yeqin [16] studied 60 elderly patients with functional constipation using combined auricular acupressure and acupoint massage, achieving a total effective rate of 91.7% with significant results. The combined application of acupoint massage and auricular acupressure achieves better therapeutic effects with fewer adverse reactions and

greater patient acceptance, warranting clinical promotion.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Functional constipation is common among elderly patients, with treatment primarily relying on medication that easily leads to drug dependence. With the development of TCM, external nursing techniques are increasingly applied in elderly patients with functional constipation, featuring holistic regulation, simple operation, few adverse reactions, and cost-effectiveness, making them readily accepted by elderly patients. As national health authorities increasingly emphasize TCM nursing techniques, related research has grown in recent years, though studies on mechanisms remain limited. Future research should explore mechanisms to provide theoretical foundations for clinical application. In clinical practice, comprehensive nursing approaches combining existing care models with TCM external nursing techniques should be adopted for elderly functional constipation to better improve treatment outcomes and patients' quality of life.

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