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Nursing Experience in Treating One Patient with Simple Obesity of Spleen Deficiency and Dampness Excess Pattern Using Combined Dampness-Eliminating Cupping and Acupoint Application

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of dampness-eliminating cupping combined with acupoint plaster therapy in a case of simple obesity with spleen-deficiency dampness-excess pattern, and summarized the nursing care experience. Guided by the theory of TCM syndrome differentiation and nursing care, as well as fundamental TCM theories and meridian theory, the application of cupping therapy and traditional Chinese medicine acupoint plaster therapy effectively reduced the patient's body weight and enhanced the patient's self-perceived health-related quality of life (HRQoL). The intervention features simple operation, remarkable efficacy, minimal adverse effects, low cost, and good acceptability, thereby receiving positive nursing care evaluation.

Full Text

Preamble

Nursing Experience of a Patient with Simple Obesity of Spleen Deficiency and Dampness Excess Pattern Treated with Dehumidification Cupping Combined with Acupoint Application

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Abstract

This article observes the therapeutic effects of dehumidification cupping combined with acupoint application therapy in a patient with simple obesity of spleen deficiency and dampness excess pattern, and summarizes the nursing experience. Guided by the theory of TCM syndrome differentiation and nursing, as well as fundamental TCM and meridian theories, the application of cupping and herbal acupoint application effectively reduced the patient's body weight and improved their self-perceived health-related quality of life (HRQoL). This approach is simple to operate, demonstrates significant effects, has few adverse reactions, is inexpensive, and is readily accepted by patients, resulting in favorable nursing evaluations.

Keywords: Dehumidification cupping; Acupoint application; Spleen deficiency and dampness excess

Introduction

Simple obesity is a metabolic disease characterized by abnormal increases in body fat that readily accumulates in vital organs such as the liver, heart, and kidneys, increasing the risk of type 2 diabetes, essential hypertension, cancer, and coronary heart disease [1]. Current treatment methods for simple obesity include dietary restriction, exercise, liposuction, and weight-loss medications, but each has limitations. Excessive dietary restriction may cause hypoglycemia and malnutrition; liposuction is traumatic and expensive; and weight-loss medications carry various adverse reactions [2]. Traditional Chinese medicine has documented obesity and related treatment methods since ancient times. The *Huangdi Neijing* classified obesity into three types: “fat person,” “grease person,” and “muscular person.” The *Danxi Xinfu* noted that “obese and fair-skinned individuals tend to have phlegm-dampness,” advocating treatment focused on strengthening the spleen, resolving dampness, and transforming phlegm. TCM holds that the primary causes of obesity are qi deficiency and phlegm-dampness. The spleen governs transformation and transportation and is the source of postnatal qi and blood production. In spleen deficiency, phlegm-dampness accumulates internally, and qi and blood production becomes insufficient, eventually leading to qi and blood deficiency. Additionally, obese individuals often crave rich, sweet, and greasy foods, which the deficient spleen cannot properly transform and transport, causing them to stagnate internally and eventually transform into phlegm [3]. Therefore, TCM considers the spleen as the primary disease location in obesity, with spleen deficiency and dampness excess being the most common pattern. Treatment using the method of strengthening the spleen and resolving dampness effectively transforms phlegm-dampness and restores the source of qi and blood production, yielding prominent weight-loss effects. Compared with conventional treatments such as diet control and exercise, this approach is less prone to rebound, safe, reliable, free of adverse reactions, non-invasive, and more readily accepted by patients. This article analyzes the clinical efficacy of strengthening the spleen and resolving

dampness method in treating one case of simple obesity with spleen deficiency and dampness excess pattern, now reported as follows.

1. Clinical Data

The patient was a 36-year-old male who visited the Internal Medicine Clinic of Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine Oriental Hospital Economic-Technological Development Area Campus on May 5, 2023. His chief complaint was unexplained weight gain over the past five years with slightly increased appetite. Presenting symptoms included obesity, food stagnation with fatigue, heavy limbs, abdominal distension with loose stools, oliguria, pale tongue with thin coating, and thready pulse. The patient denied changes in lifestyle or dietary habits. His mother had a history of hypertension. The patient had no surgical history and his psychological status was stable. One month prior, he had experienced hypoglycemia due to dieting. Measurements: height 168 cm, weight 91 kg, blood pressure 132/80 mmHg, random blood glucose 5.8 mmol/L, waist circumference 98 cm, BMI 28.7 kg/m². Western medicine diagnosis: simple obesity. TCM diagnosis: obesity disease, pattern differentiation: spleen deficiency and dampness excess.

2.1.1 Obesity Diagnostic Criteria

The diagnostic criteria for obesity referenced the 2011 *Expert Consensus on Prevention and Treatment of Obesity in Chinese Adults*, which defines obesity as BMI ≥ 28 kg/m² or waist circumference ≥ 90 cm in males and ≥ 85 cm in females. The patient met the criteria for obesity.

2.1.2 HRQoL Measurement Standard

The *China Nutrition and Chronic Disease Status Report (2020)* indicates that overweight or obesity may increase the risk of related complications and mortality, imposing significant economic burden and causing serious negative impacts on patients' health-related quality of life (HRQoL) and disease self-perception [4-5]. The IWQOL-Lite scale, developed by American scholars including Kolotkin, is widely used to measure HRQoL in overweight or obese populations [6]. The IWQOL-Lite scale comprises five dimensions: physical function, self-esteem, sexual life, public distress, and work, each scored from 0 to 100, with higher scores representing better health status.

2.3 Nursing Plan

Based on the patient's nursing problems, the following nursing objectives were established: (1) Utilize TCM specialty nursing to improve the patient's constitution and reduce body weight. (2) Prevent obesity-related genetic diseases.

2.4.1 TCM Specialty Nursing

2.4.1.1 Dehumidification Cupping Positioning: The patient empties the bladder and lies supine on the treatment bed, fully exposing the abdominal skin. **Method:** (1) Select appropriately sized cups and perform flash cupping along the Conception Vessel, Spleen Meridian, and Stomach Meridian pathways on the abdomen for two passes, using light technique and mild stimulation to ensure patient comfort, while avoiding the Shenque (CV8) umbilical point. (2) Apply appropriately sized cups to abdominal points including bilateral Tianshu (ST25), Liangmen (ST21), Daheng (SP15), Zhongwan (CV12), Shangwan (CV13), Guanyuan (CV4), and Shuidao (ST28), retaining cups for 5 minutes with mild stimulation to ensure patient comfort. Treatment was administered once weekly.

2.4.1.2 Acupoint Application Herbal acupoint application was employed at Shenque (CV8), Zhangmen (LR13), Daheng (SP15), Zhongwan (CV12), and Tianshu (ST25). The herbal formula consisted of *Evodia rutaecarpa*, *Cinnamomum cassia*, *Boswellia carterii*, *Rheum palmatum*, *Magnolia officinalis* (ginger-processed), and *Sinapis alba*, among other herbs. These medicinal materials were ground into powder, and 10 g was mixed with appropriate amounts of ginger juice to form a paste. Approximately 0.3 g of the prepared medicine was applied to a 5 cm × 5 cm specialized patch, which was retained for 4–6 hours each application. During this period, if the patient experienced a prickling sensation at the application site with redness or blistering, this was considered a normal reaction; if severe, the primary physician should be consulted and the patch removed. Before application, the skin around the acupoints must be assessed for damage or allergic history. Patients are instructed to bathe before application and wear cool clothing to avoid excessive sweating that may affect treatment and patch adhesion. Relevant precautions and purposes should be explained to patients before herbal acupoint application. Application was performed once daily for 30 consecutive days.

2.4.2 Conventional Nursing

Patients were guided to develop good lifestyle habits, including early sleep and early rising. Dietary recommendations emphasized increased consumption of fresh vegetables (vitamins), fruits, brown rice, and corn products to enrich food variety, enhance intestinal peristalsis, and ensure adequate hydration.

2.4.3 Mindfulness Intervention

TCM psychological adjustment: “Mindfulness intervention” is a form of TCM psychological adjustment. During weight reduction, “mindfulness intervention” emphasizes engaging the entire body and mind, awakening self-awareness in obese individuals through simple eating and exercise to find pathways to happiness. Weight-loss participants can attempt to forget psychological issues arising from obesity such as inferiority, avoidance, and self-abandonment, clarify their

relationship with food, overcome excessive food cravings, modify dietary and lifestyle habits, facilitate weight loss, and gradually attain happiness and confidence [7].

2.5 Nursing Effect Evaluation

Following one month of treatment, the patient's body fat percentage, waist-to-hip ratio, and basal metabolic rate (BMR) significantly decreased, gradually returning to normal levels. Symptoms including overweight, edema, heavy limbs, fatigue, and dizziness were markedly relieved. TCM syndrome scores also improved significantly, with primary symptoms including obesity, fatigue, heavy limbs, edema, loose stools, oliguria, and abdominal fullness, as well as secondary symptoms including listlessness with reluctance to speak, bland taste without thirst, and sallow complexion all showing obvious relief. Body composition was measured using a body composition analyzer for body fat percentage, with waist circumference measured at the umbilical level and hip circumference at the maximum gluteal circumference; waist-to-hip ratio was calculated as waist circumference divided by hip circumference. BMR was calculated using the formula $BMI (kg/m^2) = weight (kg) / height^2 (m^2)$. Comparison of HRQoL and self-awareness scores before and after treatment are presented in .

Dehumidification cupping acts on corresponding meridians and acupoints to activate meridian qi, unblock meridian qi and blood, and promote substance metabolism. Flash cupping on abdominal points such as Tianshu and Guanyuan is particularly effective for accelerating the excretion of metabolic waste and improving substance exchange in mesenteric microcirculation. The physical stimulation from cupping increases vascular permeability, promotes blood circulation, and accelerates metabolism to achieve weight-loss effects. Cupping dilates the sweat pores, stimulates sebaceous and sweat gland function, accelerates shedding of senescent cells, and promotes elimination of waste and toxins. By stimulating local body areas, cupping regulates endocrine function, balances qi and blood, promotes gastrointestinal motility, accelerates lymphatic and blood circulation, and enhances metabolism. Through stimulation of meridians and acupoints, this method activates two major system functions, promotes fat metabolism, consumes accumulated fat, increases heat production, and restores the body's self-equilibrium.

Cupping improves internal circulation by stimulating acupoints, enhances cellular activity, unblocks meridians, eliminates stasis, and reduces congestion, thereby effectively decomposing and consuming accumulated fat. It demonstrates good effects on deep fat while reducing superficial fat, achieving the efficacy of strengthening spleen and kidney function. By unblocking meridians, cupping eliminates pathogenic factors and demonstrates excellent weight-loss effects while reducing local fat accumulation. This patient with spleen deficiency and dampness excess pattern obesity was in a suboptimal health state. According to TCM theory, establishing the concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" can effectively intervene in spleen deficiency and dampness excess

constitution and reduce the incidence of related diseases [8].

This case employed traditional acupoint application therapy, which regulates meridians and harmonizes qi and blood through calculation of the body's qi-blood, meridian, and organ systems [9], employing the treatment principle of strengthening the spleen and eliminating dampness. Spleen-stomach diseases are located in the middle jiao; therefore, application sites are on the abdomen. Applying medicinals to Shenque (CV8) is effective because the umbilical skin is thin with abundant arterial branches and venous networks, facilitating medicinal absorption [10]. Tianshu is the alarm point of the Large Intestine Meridian, effective for regulating intestinal function and relieving acute pain; Guanyuan is the alarm point of the Small Intestine Meridian, capable of nourishing kidney foundation and supplementing original qi [11]. After absorption, medicinals bypass hepatoenteric circulation, reducing gastrointestinal first-pass destruction and improving drug utilization to ensure clinical efficacy [12]. *Evodia rutaecarpa* and *Cinnamomum cassia* warm yang and transform qi; combined, these herbs supplement spleen qi, dry dampness, and stop diarrhea while warming yang. Under dual action of acupoint stimulation and external medicinals, this achieves the effect of warming the middle and stopping diarrhea. *Boswellia carterii* moves qi and resolves stagnation, excelling at regulating qi; *Rheum palmatum* breaks accumulation and moves blood stasis; ginger-processed *Magnolia officinalis* dries dampness, transforms phlegm, descends qi, and relieves fullness, excelling at moving middle jiao qi and dredging qi mechanism; *Sinapis alba* moves qi, harmonizes the stomach, and induces blistering for transdermal effects, enhancing acupoint stimulation [13]. Regarding point selection: Tianshu, as the large intestine alarm point, effectively regulates intestinal function and relieves acute pain; Daheng and Fujie are located on the Spleen Meridian of Foot-Taiyin, effectively relieving digestive symptoms caused by spleen-stomach dysfunction; Qihai and Guanyuan are Conception Vessel points that supplement qi deficiency symptoms from middle qi insufficiency, communicate upper and lower qi mechanisms, and further regulate the spleen's ascending-clear and descending-turbid functions. Guanyuan, as the small intestine alarm point, also regulates intestinal function and dredges middle jiao fermentation. Shenque is located at the umbilicus, and umbilical therapy holds an important position in TCM external treatment methods. The umbilicus connects with the twelve regular meridians and eight extraordinary meridians, serving as the master pivot of meridians and an important point on the Conception Vessel (the "sea of yin meridians") and Governor Vessel (the "sea of yang meridians"). Based on the characteristics of umbilical acupoints, acupoint application therapy allows medicinals to enter the body and achieve specific therapeutic effects through medicinal property meridian tropism [14-15].

In summary, compared with conventional treatments such as medical nutrition therapy and exercise intervention alone, dehumidification cupping combined with acupoint application demonstrates superior efficacy in treating simple obesity of spleen deficiency and dampness excess pattern, alleviating clinical symptoms and reducing body fat content and weight. This case achieved organic

integration of “disease and pattern,” “treatment and nursing,” and “Chinese medicinals and TCM nursing” [16], representing a promising approach for clinical promotion.

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