

# ADD and ADHD in Children

Julian Scott and Teresa Barlow

When I went to school (in the middle-ages, as my children would say), there was only one child in the whole school who was disruptive, and only one who was seriously dreamy. Now, in some schools there are several in each class who are on Ritalin. ADD and ADHD are not new conditions. There have always been children who could not concentrate, and always children who could not sit still. What is new is the frequency.

Over the years we have treated many children with these conditions. We would say that all have benefited, though some more than others. Probably the reason why the results have been variable is that it is hard to determine what exactly needs to be treated. We have found little help from the Chinese texts, and there are only a few other practitioners in the West who treat many such patients; so we have had to find our own way, and what we describe here is based merely on our own experience.

Having said that, we feel that acupuncture is one of the more effective therapies for treating ADD and ADHD. When used in the so-called 8-Principles way, it can be helpful in correcting the physical imbalances, which lead to the conditions. When used in the so-called 5-Element way, it can help to right imbalances at the mental–emotional level.

## **Where is the problem?**

ADD is an acronym, which stands for Attention Deficit Disorder, and means difficulty in concentrating. ADHD stands for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, and is a

variation on the same theme. As such, the problem resides not in the body, but in the mind. Just as the symptom of asthma is due to malfunction of the lungs, so ADD is due to a problem in the mind. That unruly part of our makeup, which has been likened to a baby monkey, refuses to stay still for long enough to learn anything.

## **Physical or mental?**

The first step in diagnosing ADD and ADHD is to decide how much of a physical imbalance there is. To what extent is the mind unruly and restless simply because it is disturbed? For example, if a child comes from a broken home, is beaten by a drunken father, and watches violent television programmes, there is little chance that the child's mind will be peaceful and calm. There will be some fairly large ripples disturbing the surface of the lake that is the mind. Even if such a child were physically healthy, and eating the purest macrobiotic food, there would be little chance of being able to concentrate. Acupuncture treatment on its own is unlikely to have much effect.

At the other end of the scale we find clear physical imbalances which cause ADD and ADHD. Here the symptoms arise because the energetics of the body are significantly disturbed, and so do not support a peaceful mind. The mind is disturbed not so much by the stimulation of the

mind itself, but because the physical nourishment is faulty in some way. Acupuncture is usually very helpful in such conditions.

### **Is it pathological?**

The next question to ask is whose problem is it? Is the problem one of society, or school, or is it really a pathological condition of the child that could and should be helped? This was brought home to me early on in my practice by a boy who was the son of distinguished parents. Their stock was strong, and amongst this child's ancestors were intrepid explorers of darkest Africa (as it was at that time). I examined the child, and found that there was nothing wrong energetically. Quite the contrary, he was one of the healthiest and strongest boys that I have ever seen. He was brought to me because the school kept on complaining about his disruptive behaviour. It was very clear to me that his behaviour, though disruptive, was not his problem, but the school's. The school simply could not handle a boy of such enormous energy and inventiveness.

As another example, in Israel we had a 3-year-old brought to us who had been diagnosed (by the mother this time) as 'hyperactive'. On further questioning it turned out that he could not sit still at a desk learning his Hebrew letters for much more than 20 minutes at a time. Whose was the problem?

### **The Patterns**

Over the years we have found that there are several energetic imbalances contributing to ADD and ADHD. In particular, we have found that if these energetic imbalances are there, the condition responds very well to acupuncture. The use of simple treatments to correct the imbalance will help the child, often dramatically. On the other hand, our experience has been that if there is no major energetic imbalance, or if the imbalance is very confused, it means that the problem is mainly due to a disturbed mind, and then the results are very variable. Sometimes the child improves, but frequently there is little change, or only a short-term change.

The patterns we have found are:

- Heat
- Heat and phlegm
- Thick Phlegm
- Spleen Qi Deficiency
- Kidney Jing Insufficient

(These are the same patterns as in Acupuncture in the Treatment of Children with the addition of Thick Phlegm)

### **Heat**

My first case of ADHD came into the clinic shortly after I had opened the doors at the children's clinic in Brighton, some 20 years ago. At that time Ritalin was not known in the UK and even the terms ADD and ADHD were almost unknown. This is not to say that the conditions were unknown – this child was very clearly hyperactive. He was very strong, and spent the whole time running up and down, throwing wooden blocks. His exhausted mother said that she put him to bed at about 11 p.m., and that by 4 am he was up, running backwards and forwards. This is quite characteristic of the Heat pattern: very energetic, little sleep, wild and uncontrolled behaviour.

## **Heat and Phlegm**

It was a few years later that I came across the pattern where Heat and Phlegm are combined to make a deadly cocktail. This child was not quite so hyperactive, but was clearly difficult to control. In her case the behaviour was unpredictable. She too had difficulty in going to sleep (characteristic of Heat), but once asleep she was difficult to rouse (characteristic of Phlegm). What distinguishes this pattern is the way the Heat combines with the Phlegm to 'mist the Heart' i.e. to bring out something rather nasty. In her case I was soon to be made aware of this aspect. She came towards me with a slightly manic smile, and sunk her teeth into the crotch of my trousers. It was only because of my guardian angels that I did not receive a nasty injury. This behaviour is characteristic of Heat combining with Phlegm, for the child (aged 5 years) was doing something that she knew to be wrong.

## **Thick Phlegm**

The Thick Phlegm pattern is essentially the same as the Lingering Pathogenic Factor pattern, described in detail in *Acupuncture in the Treatment of Children*. Sometimes there are obvious signs of phlegm, such as runny nose, chronic cough, or even asthma; but often there are no obvious signs. You only know the phlegm is present from the other small signs, such as enlarged lymph glands, a glazed look in the eyes, a depigmented patch on the cheek, inexplicable drops in energy etc. The behaviour pattern that you will see could be likened to someone swimming in treacle. You ask the child to do something, and first of all it does not seem to hear. You are not at all clear whether the child has glue-ear (which it sometimes does on account of the phlegm) or whether they have really heard, but are not responding. Then when you finally get through to the child, the child will react, but then soon be distracted. Typically, a 7 or 8 year old child will take an hour to get dressed in the morning, in spite of being continuously nagged – much to the exasperation of the parents!

## **Spleen Qi Deficiency**

In our book, we describe the 'new' pattern of Hyperactive Spleen Qi Deficient. Modern life is so complicated, and there are so few clear 'rights' and 'wrongs' that it can be difficult for parents to impose boundaries and discipline. For some children that is fine, and they find their own boundaries, but there are others whom it does not suit. Their exhausted parents do not have the energy to make them sit down to a meal, and they eat less and less while becoming more and more hyperactive. Over time, this leads to the Spleen becoming weak, and the weakened Spleen cannot support the mind in its function of thinking.

While working in Seattle, I had a patient who clearly had this condition, and equally clearly it was due to problems the mother had in imposing boundaries. When I suggested that some boundaries might help her child, she astounded me by asking "Do you think it is all right for her to dance on the table while we are having supper?" It was with difficulty that I restrained from giving an opinion, and it took an effort of will to reply with a question of "Do you think it is all right?"

## **Kidney Jing Insufficient**

I have described the Kidney Jing Deficient children elsewhere (in *EJOM*). They tend to have weak bones, and to be rather goofy. They are slow developers, and are easily tired. They are not really on this planet. What is worse for them is that they have no defences against the stresses of modern life. They are open to every influence, physical and psychic, and are blown this way and that, as though by the wind. With this instability, they have difficulty in remembering things from one moment to the next, and do not have the will power to direct their minds.

## **Is needle technique important – the Dosey Moron Prays to Heaven needle technique.**

On Friday afternoons in a student clinic, the atmosphere is sometimes affected by ADD, and during these times we gossip. One result of these gossips was a discussion of needle techniques used by students. It is a needle technique which I frequently use myself, and on a hot lazy Friday afternoon we named it DMPH, the Dozy Moron Prays to Heaven. It consists of sticking the needle in, rotating it a bit a bit clockwise, then a bit anticlockwise, and then wiggling it a bit. Finally, a prayer in the hope that it will work. (This part is very important, and is known in some circles as 'intention'.)

In many illnesses, treating Zusanli St-36 with the DMPH technique will make big difference to the patient's condition, and may even cure them. This is, of course, the great secret that hitherto has been confined to an inner circle of experienced practitioners. Unfortunately, there are certain conditions where the DMPH technique does not work so well, and ADD and ADHD fall into this category. Just to add to the difficulties, you cannot even use the same needle technique in the five patterns. In the Heat pattern, I have found that results are much better when a really strong dispersing technique is used. In the child described above, I did not really start to get any significant change in his behaviour until I used such a thick needle that it drew a few drops of blood from Xingjian Liv-2 and Neiting St-44, in the same treatment. It took a lot of courage to give such a painful treatment, but in the event, he hardly noticed what I was doing. He was so used to hurting himself by bumping into things while running at high speed, that he hardly noticed the pain caused by the needles.

At the other end of the scale, there are the Kidney Jing Insufficient children. With these children it is essential to tonify. In fact, to use needles at all is often cruelty, for they are often overcome by hysterical panic by the thought of needles. Moreover, if you do use needles, it is very easy to disperse accidentally. I did that once on a child. Even though I was using the finest needles, I made the child worse by inserting the needle clumsily. Since that time, I have confined myself to using moxa on these very weak children. The moral of these tales is that whatever points you choose, it is still important to use an appropriate needle technique.

### **Advice to the parents**

The most important advice is on diet. Children with ADD or ADHD have to avoid all artificial colourings and all artificial flavourings, and all food containing refined sugar. If the children continue to eat even the smallest amount of these foods, there is no point in giving treatment. Send them away, for they are wasting their time and yours. For many children this advice extends to oranges too, even organically grown ones.

In principle, children with ADD and ADHD should not watch more than half an hour of television each week. This is not just on account of the scenes of violence and sudden death, but because of the flickering screen, which overexcites the mind. However, there is little chance of the parents putting this advice into practice. Either they will not believe you or, even if they do believe you, they simply will not have the will-power to turn the television off.

### **Conclusion**

As I mentioned at the beginning, acupuncture can be of great help, with some children being completely cured. But pause for a moment to reflect what will happen to your practice if you

advertise your new ADD and ADHD clinic in the local newspaper. When the waiting room is full, that piece of fine porcelain that you brought back from China may not last very long. The peace and calm of the waiting room may be disturbed. The soft music that helps to relax the adults may be inaudible.

We would be very glad to hear of other practitioner's experiences, their points of view, their successes in treating, so that we can all develop more effective ways of helping the children and their families. You may contact us at our practice in Bath, or via email. [scott.julian@ukgateway.net](mailto:scott.julian@ukgateway.net), or write to the editor.