

22. Trigeminal Neuralgia

Trigeminal neuralgia refers to transient paroxysmal megalgia of the trigeminal nerve pathway. Its cause is uncertain, possibly related to compression of the trigeminal nerve root at its entry point into the brainstem. It is clinically marked by sudden onset of stabbing or burning pain along the pathway of the affected nerve, usually evoked by speaking, chewing, washing the face, brushing the teeth, catching cold, or touching "trigger points" on the face. According to TCM, trigeminal neuralgia belongs to the category of Mian Tong (facial pain), and is caused by attack of exogenous wind pathogen or by flaring-up of liver fire, obstructing the flow of qi and blood and resulting in pain in the teeth and face.

I. STANDARD TREATMENT

Trigeminal neuralgia is generally divided into four types — obstruction of the collaterals by wind-cold with phlegm, obstruction of the collaterals by wind-heat with phlegm, flaring up of liver fire, and blood stasis in the collaterals. Points of the Yangming and Shaoyang Meridians are frequently selected in its treatment.

1. Obstruction of the Collaterals by Wind-Cold with Phlegm

Manifestations: Sudden onset of paroxysmal severe stabbing pain in the face, which is aggravated by cold and relieved by warmth.

Tongue: Pale with white coating.

Pulse: Tight or wiry.

Treatment Principle: Disperse wind and cold, transform phlegm, dredge the collateral, stop pain.

Point Prescription & Manipulation:

Primary points:

Ashi Points /
GB-20 Fengchi - ^

SJ-5 Waiguan - ^
ST-40 Fenglong - ^
ST-36 Zusanli / ^

Explanation:

The Ashi Points refer to the followings:

- 1□ BL-2 Cuanzhu, GB-14 Yangbai and EX-HN-4 Yuyao for pain in the first branch of the trigeminal nerve;
- 2□ ST-2 Sibai, SI-18 Quanliao and ST-3 Juliao for pain in the second branch of the trigeminal nerve;
- 3□ ST-6 Jiache, ST-7 Xiaguan and RN-24 Chengjiang for pain in the third branch of the trigeminal nerve.

- Ashi Points promote circulation of qi and blood in the diseased region to relieve pain;
- GB-20 Fengchi and SJ-5 Waiguan dispel external wind and cold pathogens;
- ST-40 Fenglong and ST-36 Zusanli reinforce the middle-jiao and transform phlegm.

Secondary points according to conditions:

- 1□ Severe pain — PC-6 Neiguan [-] and BL-17 Geshu [-].

2. Obstruction of Collaterals by Wind-Heat with Phlegm

Manifestations: Sudden onset of paroxysmal stabbing and burning pain in the face, which is aggravated by heat and relieved by cold, flushed face, red eyes, sweating, thirst, scanty and dark urine.

Tongue: Red body with yellow coating.

Pulse: Smooth or smooth and wiry.

Treatment Principle: Disperse wind and heat, transform phlegm, activate collaterals, and stop pain.

Point Prescription & Manipulation:

Primary points:

Ashi Points (the same as above) -
LI-1 Shangyang -
SJ-1 Guanchong -

SI-1 Shaoze -
 LI-11 Quchi -
 ST-40 Fenglong -

Explanation:

Puncture LI-1 Shangyang, SJ-1 Guanchong and SI-1 Shaoze with the three-edged needle to bleed.

- Ashi Points promote circulation of qi and blood in the diseased region to relieve pain;
- LI-1 Shangyang, SJ-1 Guanchong and SI-1 Shaoze, the Jing-Well Points of the three Hand-Yang Meridians, dispel wind-heat from the three Hand-Yang Meridians;
- LI-11 Quchi clears heat from Yangming Meridian;
- ST-40 Fenglong transforms phlegm.

Secondary points according to conditions:

- 1☐ Fever with headache — LI-4 Hegu [-] and GB-20 Fengchi [-].

3. Flaring-Up of Liver Fire

Manifestations: Sudden onset of paroxysmal stabbing and burning pain in the face, which is aggravated by heat and relieved by cold, flushed face, red eyes, irritability, distressed sensation in the chest and hypochondriac region, thirst, bitter taste in the mouth, dark urine, constipation.

Tongue: Red body with yellow coating.

Pulse: Wiry.

Treatment Principle: Clear liver fire.

Point Prescription & Manipulation:

Primary points:

Ashi Points (The same as above) -
 SJ-2 Yemen -
 LR-2 Xingjian -
 GB-43 Xiayi -
 LR-8 Ququan -

Explanation:

- Ashi Points promote circulation of qi and blood in the diseased region to relieve pain;

- SJ-2 Yemen, LR-2 Xingjian and GB-43 Xiayi clear fire from the liver;
- LR-8 Ququan nourishes the liver yin to reduce fire.

Secondary points according to conditions:

- 1☐ Distending fullness in chest and hypochondrium — SJ-6 Zhigou [-];
 2☐ Dry stools — ST-44 Neiting [-];
 3☐ Restlessness and over susceptibility to being angry — PC-7 Daling [-].

4. Blood Stasis in the Collaterals

Manifestations: Protracted course of repeated attack of paroxysmal pain in the face, which is stabbing and intolerable, dark complexion.

Tongue: Purplish body with ecchymotic spots.

Pulse: Unsmooth.

Treatment Principle: Remove blood stasis and activate collaterals.

Point Prescription & Manipulation:

Primary points:

Local tender points -
 BL-17 Geshu - ^
 BL-18 Ganshu - ^
 SP-6 Sanyinjiao / ^
 ST-36 Zusanli / ^

Explanation:

- Local tender points promote circulation of qi and blood in the diseased region to relieve pain;
- BL-17 Geshu, the Influential Point of blood, and BL-18 Ganshu, the Back-Shu Point of the liver, promote blood circulation and remove blood stasis;
- SP-6 Sanyinjiao and ST-36 Zusanli reinforce qi and blood and promote their circulation.

Secondary points according to conditions:

- 1☐ Severe pain with restlessness — HT-7 Shenmen [-] and PC-6 Neiguan [-].

II. EXPERIENTIAL TREATMENT

1. Puncturing EX-HN-4 Yuyao

Indication: Pain of the first branch of the trigeminal nerve.

Point Prescription:

EX-HN-4 Yuyao of the diseased side.

Manipulation: Insert a needle obliquely downwards 0.3-0.5 cun deep to induce an electric sensation to the patient, and gently lift and thrust the needle 20-50 times. The treatment is given once daily or every other day, with 10 treatments as a course.

2. Puncturing ST-2 Sibai

Indication: Pain of the second branch of the trigeminal nerve.

Point Prescription:

ST-2 Sibai of the diseased side.

Manipulation: Insert a needle obliquely upwards into the point at an angle of 45 degrees to induce an electric sensation radiating to the upper lip. Thrust and lift the needle 20-50 times. The treatment is given once daily or every other day, with 10 treatments as a course.

3. Puncturing ST-7 Xiaguan

Indication: Pain of the third or second branch of the trigeminal nerve.

Point Prescription:

ST-7 Xiaguan of the diseased side.

Manipulation: Puncture perpendicularly 1.5 cun to induce an electric sensation radiating to the bottom of the tongue or the mandible, thrust and lift the needle 20-50 times. The treatment is given once daily or every other day, with 10 treatments as a course.

4. Puncturing SI-18 Quanliao

Indication: Trigeminal neuralgia.

Point Prescription:

SI-18 Quanliao of the diseased side

Manipulation: Puncture perpendicularly about 2.5 cun to induce an electric sensation radiating over the whole face of the diseased side, retain the needle for 30 minutes, and manipulate it every 10 minutes. The treatment is given once daily or every other day. Usually, 1-3 courses are needed.

5. Puncturing SI-19 Tinggong

Indication: Trigeminal neuralgia.

Point prescription:

SI-19 Tinggong of the diseased side.

Manipulation: Puncture perpendicularly 0.6-0.8 cun deep, manipulate the needle gently to avoid inducing pain to the patient, retain the needle for 30-60 minutes, and manipulate it every 10 minutes. The treatment is given once daily or every other day, with 10 treatments as a course. Usually, after or during the treatment the patient's pain will be relieved.

Comment:

Trigeminal neuralgia is an obstinate disease, and no especially effective therapy has been discovered. As Zhenjiu is effective to relieve pain in most cases and does not have any side effect, it can be taken as the first choice for treatment of trigeminal neuralgia. In the Zhenjiu treatment, selection of the local points and selection of distal points should be combined, but the local points are chief. Generally, mild stimulation with long retention of the needles is applied on the local points, while strong stimulation with reducing manipulation is applied on the distal points. Usually, Zhenjiu will be more effective if massage is applied in cooperation.

Notes: