Acupuncture for Menstrual Disorders and Endometriosis

Almost 50% of women experience monthly menstrual pain or discomfort. There are 150 recognized symptoms of Pre Menstrual Syndrome ("PMS") which affect teenage girls, menopausal women and everyone in between. Physical symptoms include abdominal cramps, lower back pain, breast tenderness, joint swelling, food cravings, bloating, headaches, skin problems and fatigue. Cognitive problems include sadness, anxiety, anger, mood swings, irritability, poor concentration, and panic attacks. The number, type and severity of symptoms experienced vary from woman to woman, and from month to month.

Approximately 2.5-5% of women experience Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) wherein the symptoms are so severe they interfere with normal daily activities. The premenstrual symptoms are also intensified if a woman has endometriosis. Symptoms usually begin 7-10 days before the onset of the period and then immediately decline. Symptoms do not occur throughout the entire menstrual cycle. If a woman experiences symptoms throughout the menstrual cycle, it is not PMS or PMDD.

The cause of PMS and PMDD is multi-factorial. According to Western, or “traditional” medical beliefs, these symptoms arise from hormone imbalances, metabolic deregulation, environmental factors or a combination therein. Acupuncturists theorize that the menstrual cycle consists of a dynamic flow of opposing yet synergistic Yin and Yang energies. A symptom-free menstrual cycle occurs when the Yin and Yang energy flows are balanced. Acupuncture needles access these energies through external points on the body’s surface to create the necessary balance. Acupuncture’s effects can also be explained in “Western” terms. The acupuncture needles stimulate the release of endorphins and serotonin, chemicals which in turn signal the central nervous system that the body has no irregularities. Endorphins are hormones which are naturally produced during exercise and excitement, and stimulate feelings of pleasure and analgesia. Serotonin promotes psychological wellbeing which can also help relax muscle contractions and help relieve and stop the menstrual cramping.

Both “Western” medicine and acupuncture seek to stimulate release of these chemicals. Western treatments seek to do so with pain medications, hormones or psychiatric medications. Acupuncture is an excellent alternative for women who prefer a more holistic approach.

What Should I Expect From An Acupuncture Consultation?

Dr. Stein asks patients considering acupuncture to first schedule an office visit. This consultation is like any other doctor visit you schedule and therefore covered by your health insurance carrier. During this visit, Dr. Stein will carefully review your problem and your medical history and then perform a physical exam. She uses this consultation to help you decide if acupuncture is an appropriate treatment.

Dr. Stein, a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician, is also a licensed acupuncturist. A graduate of UMDNJ/Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, she completed both her residency and acupuncture training at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Stein is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.