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Restless Leg Syndrome Guide

Treatment techniques Rooted in Chinese Wisdom



Overview

Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS), also known as Willis-Ekbom disease, is a neurological disorder characterised by an uncontrollable urge to move the legs, often accompanied by unpleasant sensations such as tingling, crawling, or aching. It typically occurs in the evening or at night, when sitting or lying down. From a Western medical perspective the exact cause is unknown but is thought to be linked to imbalances in dopamine, a brain chemical that sends messages to control muscle movement. In Chinese Medicine, the condition is attributed to a disruption in the flow of Qi and blood, often related to deficiencies or imbalances in the Liver, Kidney and Spleen systems, with the Heart also playing a significant role.

Causes

- **Liver Blood Deficiency:** The Liver in Chinese Medicine is responsible for storing blood, which is essential for nourishing the muscles and sinews of the body. A deficiency in Liver Qi and blood can result in inadequate nourishment of the limbs, leading to the restlessness and discomfort characteristic of Restless Leg Syndrome.
- **Kidney Yin Deficiency:** The Kidneys are considered to be the source of Yin and Yang energies in the body. Kidney Yin represents the cooling, moistening and nourishing aspects, whereas Kidney Yang represents the warming and active energy. A deficiency in Kidney Yin, can lead to a relative excess of Yang, and it is this Yin/Yang imbalance that can manifest as internal Heat and agitation, contributing to the unpleasant sensations symptomatic of RLS.
- **Dampness and Heat:** An accumulation of Dampness and Heat in the body can obstruct the smooth flow of Qi and blood. Most often as a result of imbalances and disharmony in the Spleen, these pathogens can be a significant contributing factor in the occurrence and symptoms of RLS.

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- Heart Blood and Yin Deficiency: In Chinese Medicine, the Heart governs blood and houses the Shen, which can be viewed as the Spirit or the mind. A deficiency in Heart blood and Yin can lead to the restlessness and agitation that is prevalent in RLS. This may also disturb sleep, exacerbating the symptoms of RLS at night and having the knock-on effect of compromising overall health and wellbeing.

Organs Implicated

- Liver: The Liver stores and regulates the smooth flow of Qi and blood and in the context of Restless Leg Syndrome it is Liver blood deficiency that can lead to insufficient nourishment of the tendons and muscles, causing the leg to experience discomfort and agitation. As the Liver is directly connected to the health of tendons and sinews, and therefore influences muscle relaxation and contraction, it is this lack of nourishment that can lead to the twitching and restlessness characteristic of the condition.
- Kidneys: The Kidneys play two key roles in relation to Restless Leg Syndrome; overseeing vital bone and marrow production, including the nervous system, and maintaining the balance of Yin and Yang energies in the body. If there are disharmonies within the Kidney Qi, particularly Kidney Yin, or deficiencies affecting the nervous system, this can lead to imbalances that manifest as restlessness, agitation and the sensations experienced in RLS.
- Spleen: The Spleen plays a pivotal role in transforming and transporting body fluids and nutrients, crucial for overall health. A deficiency in Spleen Qi can lead to an accumulation of Dampness, impeding the smooth flow of Qi and blood in the limbs. Additionally, when the Spleen's function in nutrient assimilation is compromised, it can result in inadequate nourishment of the muscles and sinews, exacerbating the discomfort and restlessness associated with RLS.

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- Heart: The Heart governs blood circulation and houses the Shen; it is the seat of our emotions. Deficiency in Heart Qi, particularly Yin, as well as a disturbed or agitated Shen, can lead to insomnia, mental restlessness and insufficient blood flow to the legs. This can have a direct impact on the symptoms of RLS, given the syndrome's tendency to worsen with emotional stress.

Emotions

Chronic emotional stress can severely disrupt the flow of Qi in the body. Each organ has specific negative emotions attached to it which, if left unresolved, can manifest as physical problems:

- Frustration and Anger (Liver): These are the negative emotions of the Liver. Chinese Medicine understands that unmanaged or intense feelings of frustration and anger can lead to Liver Qi Heat and stagnation. It is this stagnation that impairs the smooth flow of Qi, blood and emotions, which is a contributing factor in the development of RLS symptoms, such as the restlessness and discomfort felt in the legs.
- Fear and Anxiety (Kidneys): Chronic fear or deep-seated anxiety are the negative emotions most associated with the Kidneys. When these emotions dominate, they can deplete Kidney energy, including having an adverse effect on the nervous system, which can be particularly sensitive to emotional disturbances. It is these imbalances which can intensify the symptoms of RLS.
- Worry and Overthinking (Spleen): The Spleen is affected by excessive worry and overthinking; mental states that can severely weaken Spleen Qi and lead to an inability to efficiently manage blood and fluids within the body. It is this disruption of smooth and harmonious Spleen Qi that can contribute to the development of Dampness and stagnation that can then aggravate the symptoms of Restless Leg Syndrome.

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- Anxiety and Restlessness (Heart): The Heart is integral to emotional and mental wellbeing, particularly as it houses the Shen. Emotions such as anxiety and restlessness, in the context of Heart Qi, can disrupt blood circulation and mental equilibrium, which can exacerbate the symptoms of RLS. Additionally, the Heart's emotional state is intricately linked to other organs, notably the Liver and Kidneys, so disturbances in the Heart's emotional health can also affect the Liver's Qi regulation and the Kidneys' role in bone and nervous system health, thereby influencing the manifestation and severity of RLS.

Acupressure

Acupressure is a technique that can easily be performed as part of your self-care practices. Gentle pressure is applied to specific points on the body with fingers or an acupressure tool to help clear blockages in the meridians, the pathways of the body through which Qi flows.

GB-34 (Yánglíngquán):

Location: On the outer side of the leg, just below the knee, in the depression anterior and inferior to the head of the fibula.

Why: A valuable point for soothing the Liver and Gallbladder, which is crucial for addressing the Liver blood deficiency that can cause muscle and tendon issues related to RLS. Stimulating this point can help to clear Damp-Heat, benefiting tendons and joints, and alleviating the discomfort associated with the condition.

HE-7 (Shénmén)

Location: On the crease of the wrist, on the little finger side of the forearm.

Why: HE-7 is a vital point for the Heart. Known as the Spirit Gate, it is effective in calming the mind (Shen) and addressing emotional issues such as anxiety and restlessness, which are significant in the context of Restless Leg Syndrome. Stimulating this point helps to balancing the Heart's function, improve blood circulation and reduce mental unrest, which may positively influence RLS symptoms.

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KID-3 (Tàixī)

Location: This point is located on the inner side of the foot. Find the highest point of the inner ankle, and then slide your finger down into the depression between the ankle bone and the Achilles tendon.

Why: Activating this point is helpful for balancing Kidney Yin and Kidney Yang and benefitting the lower extremities. As Kidney Yin deficiency, especially, can lead to symptoms such as the restlessness and agitation associated with RLS, stimulating this point before bed can provide relief and encourage peaceful sleep.

SP-6 (Sānyīnjiāo)

Location: This point is located on the inner side of the lower leg. To find it, place four fingers above your inner ankle bone. The point lies just behind the shin bone (tibia), in a tender area often found just above the highest peak of the inner ankle bone.

Why: Stimulating this key point on the Spleen channel, which is also the meeting point of the Liver and Kidney channels, can be extremely effective in strengthening the Spleen, resolving Dampness, regulating blood and calming the mind, all of which are essential when managing Restless Leg Syndrome.

LIV-3 (Tàichōng)

Location: Found on the top of the foot, in the fleshy webbing between the big toe and the second toe, approximately two thumb-widths from the edge of the webbing.

Why: This Liver point is crucial for relieving Liver Qi stagnation and nourishing Liver blood. It is especially helpful for the management of Restless Leg Syndrome as it addresses the underlying Liver blood deficiency and restores the smooth flow of Qi and emotions, which over time can alleviate the unpleasant sensations of the condition.

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Yang Sheng Practices

There are many practices, lifestyle choices, self-care tools and supplements that can be used to help manage the symptoms and the root cause of Restless Leg Syndrome, including:

- **Qigong:** The controlled movement and breathwork of qigong can be highly beneficial for strengthening all the organs of the body, regulating Qi flow and balancing Yin and Yang. In the context of Restless Leg Syndrome, it can specifically help by soothing Liver Qi, nourishing Kidney Yin, and calming the Heart, thereby reducing restlessness and discomfort in the legs at night.
- **Meditation:** Regular meditation is a valuable practice at any time for overall health and wellbeing. However, with a focus on RLS it can significantly impact Heart Qi by calming the Shen and easing emotional disturbances such as anxiety and restlessness. This calming effect can also indirectly benefit the Liver and Kidneys, further reducing symptoms of the condition.
- **Diet Therapy:** A balanced diet that supports the Spleen, Liver, Kidneys and Heart is important when managing the symptoms of RLS. Foods that nourish blood and Yin, such as leafy greens, berries and nuts, are beneficial for the Kidneys and Spleen, whilst foods that are calming and grounding, such as whole grains and root vegetables, will support Heart Qi. Avoiding stimulants such as caffeine and alcohol, especially before bed, can also help in reducing Restless Leg Syndrome symptoms by not overstimulating the Heart and Shen or overburdening the Liver.
- **Bamboo Tapping:** A gentle tapping technique using a traditional bamboo tapper can help to invigorate the flow of Qi and blood throughout the body. By focusing on the legs, especially behind the knees and down the calves to encourage efficient blood flow, this practice can help disperse stagnation and calm restlessness in the lower legs and feet, aiding RLS relief.

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- Foot Bathing: A warm foot bath before bed can have a grounding and calming effect, which is especially beneficial for Heart and Kidney health, whilst supporting the Liver and Spleen too. It aids in relaxing the muscles and tendons, improving circulation in the lower extremities, and can be particularly soothing for RLS symptoms. Adding calming herbs, salts and minerals, or essential oils such as lavender, can enhance this calming effect.

Useful Supplements

There are many helpful supplements that can be taken as both preventative self-care and to alleviate symptoms of Restless Leg Syndrome, these include:

- Sour Jujube Seeds (Suan Zao Ren): Commonly used in Chinese Medicine for its calming effects and ability to aid sleep, which can be beneficial for those with RLS, especially if sleep disturbance is a major symptom.
- White Peony Root (Bai Shao): This herb is known for its muscle-relaxing and nerve-soothing properties and can be used to alleviate cramping and tension, which is often a symptom in extreme cases of the condition.
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Known for their anti-inflammatory properties and benefits to nerve health, omega-3 supplements can be beneficial for overall nerve function, potentially reducing symptoms associated with RLS.
- Magnesium: This mineral is known for its ability to relax muscles and nerves. Magnesium deficiency can lead to muscle cramps and spasms, which may worsen RLS symptoms, so using a magnesium spray on the legs, or massaging the legs and feet with magnesium butter, particularly before bedtime, may help to reduce symptoms as well as promoting restorative sleep.

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- Medicinal Mushrooms: Mushrooms such as Reishi (calming, with sleep and stress benefits), Cordyceps (energy-boosting, anti-fatigue), Lion's Mane (nerve-regenerative), Chaga (anti-inflammatory, antioxidant-rich), Shiitake (rich in vitamins and minerals for nerve and muscle function), and Turkey Tail (immune-modulating) may offer various benefits for Restless Leg Syndrome. These range from directly addressing neurological symptoms to improving overall health, as well as reducing

Conclusion

Restless Leg Syndrome, from a Chinese Medicine perspective, emphasises the balance of Qi and blood, and the health of the Liver, Kidneys, Spleen and Heart. Successful management of RLS integrates qigong, acupressure, supplements, and lifestyle and diet adjustments. This holistic approach not only targets the physical symptoms but also considers emotional wellbeing, incorporating practices such as meditation and mindful relaxation techniques. By combining these elements, the smooth flow of Qi and blood is restored, Heat and Damp resolved and Yin and Yang balanced to ensure relief from the symptoms and prevention of future occurrences of the condition.

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Want to know more?

We will be delighted to support you as you continue along your Yang Sheng journey.

The following will get you started:

'Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing' available on Amazon, Waterstone and www.hayoumethod.com

Buy Yang Sheng Book

Healing Movement classes (3 x each week) and live meditations for a more in-depth and healing practice – full details [here](#)

Free Masterclass "[Master Your Health](#)" – understand the 3- step plan for preventative health. Find more Healing Masterclasses [here](#).

Free self-care weekly content [@katiebrindle](#) on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

Free regular gua sha demonstrations on [@thehayoumethod](#) Instagram & the opportunity to purchase the accompanying tools from www.hayoumethod.com

DISCLAIMER:

Please note that any of these Yang Sheng techniques are designed to support your overall self-care and wellbeing and should not be used as a substitute for any Western medical advice or treatment that you may be receiving. You should not use the information in this Guide or on our website for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease and must always consult your doctor if you have any health concerns. Additionally, please note that there are a few contraindications to Yang Sheng techniques, so please visit www.hayoumethod.com to view our comprehensive FAQs.

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