



Stroke Recovery and Traditional Chinese Medicine

The after effects of a stroke present a daunting challenge. Conditions including weakness or paralysis on one side of the body, muscle stiffness, slurred speech, difficulties with balance and changes in moods are common. Recovery requires determination, optimism and support from family, friends and health professionals.

While being relatively a new therapy in North America, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short) is widely used in China to aid in stroke recovery, especially in ameliorating paralysis and speech difficulties. In fact, recovery rates are reported to be twice that of those treated with medication alone.¹

② **What to expect**

Over 3500 years old, Traditional Chinese Medicine has been continuously practiced, resulting in a rich history of practical clinical experience. From this has developed a unique perspective on health and illness. Treatment options that are commonly used include acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine and Tui Na massage - a Chinese style of massage.

In helping people recover from stroke, acupuncture and herbal treatments are often used, either singly or in combination. Movement therapies such as Qi Gong (also known as Chi Gung) or Tai Ji (Tai Chi) as well as massage and nutritional advice can also be recommended to assist the person's treatment.

② **Ancient Traditions, Modern Research**

In one clinical report that combined acupuncture, massage and exercise in treating 58 stroke patients reported either complete recovery or significant improvements for over 80% of those treated.² In this study, cause of the stroke included thrombosis, embolism and hemorrhagic stroke and was verified by CT scan or MRI.

A sub-specialty of acupuncture referred to as Scalp Acupuncture is often used in stroke recovery treatments. In Scalp Acupuncture, thin sterile needles are inserted just under the scalp at particular points on the head. The World Health Organization recognises Scalp Acupuncture and in 1984, approved international standards for this therapy.³

Reviews of clinical reports using Scalp Acupuncture in Asia have found that 60-80% of those treated obtain complete or significant recovery enabling them to return to regular life.⁴

Studies have also been done on the use of traditional Chinese herbal formulae to treat strokes and stroke recovery. A double-blind, multi-centre study tested the effectiveness of an extract from the Chinese

herb Chuan Xiong in the treatment of cerebral infarction. Of the 230 patients involved, 86% of those treated by the herbal extract showed measurable signs of recovery compared to 62% in the control group.⁵

A smaller clinical report detailed the use of herbal treatments for the after effects of stroke in 57 patients. After a period of 10 weeks, the study reported that 41 patients showed measurable improvements and another 10 patients showed complete recovery from the after effects of a stroke.⁶

Life after a stroke presents many challenges. Support from individuals, health practitioners and health organizations is important and helps empower and inform stroke survivors and family members.

Traditional Chinese Medicine has a long history of helping people in their recovery from a stroke and alongside conventional treatments, Traditional Chinese Medicine can play a helpful role on the road to recovery.

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 3. World Health Organization. *Standard Acupuncture Nomenclature*. WHO Regional Publication, Western Pacific Series No 1. Manila. 1984.
 4. Summarized in Inoue, Isao, et al. (see 1. above)
 5. Chen Daren, et al. Comparison study of Chuanxiong and dextra-40 treating acute cerebral infarction. *Chi J Integr Med*. 1992; 12(2): 71
 6. Wu Yu, et al. 57 cases of cerebral infarction treated with modified Hou's Huifeng San. *J Anhui TCM Col*. 1999; 18(2).
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Disclaimer

This factsheet is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.

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