

Moxibustion treatment during dog days of summer for pediatric allergic rhinitis

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The hottest days of summer are upon many areas across the world! According to the Chinese Lunar Calendar, the hottest days (also referred to as “三伏天”) occur at different times in the year as it doesn’t follow the international calendar. The day usually falls sometime after the Summer solstice which occurs when the Earth’s tilt is maximally pointed toward the sun. The Lunar calendar, however, relies on a less reliable measurement as it focuses on an unfixed object (the Moon) as people during that time still believed in a geocentric model.

The time’s significance in TCM belongs to the disease prevention ideology, namely 治未病. The concept asserts a rudimentary understanding of the prevention of disease, sequelae, and recurrence. These three concepts could be summarized into prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Dog days of summer treatment focus on prevention.

This research focuses on “天灸药” or “Tianjiu moxibustion” which refers to an adhesive patch, on which a mixture of herbs have been placed, is stuck on certain acupoints on the body to assist in the prevention of certain diseases, and it is placed on specific days according to the Lunar Calendar. The type of placements are contingent upon the person’s constitution and style of the practitioner. Separate practitioners and hospitals may also use different mixtures of herbs for the prescription as well. But the days on which persons seek treatment to cultivate health and prevent diseases, including prevention of illnesses that often occur during the winter, they will often go to TCM clinics to receive treatments during those terms every year during the summer. The days for 2020 are as follows:

July 16, 2020 through July 25, 2020 (Beginning)

July 26, 2020 through August 14, 2020 (Middle)

August 15, 2020 through August 24, 2020 (End)

In a recent research study by Ran Chuangsheng et. al. at Chongqing Wanzhou District People’s Hospital, 120 children participated in the research program. Their averages ages were about 8 years, and they experienced some allergic rhinitis symptoms over the last 3 years. All were separated into three groups, 40 each, but only 100 participants completed the course. It is important to note that 20 participants didn’t complete the study, and the research doesn’t explain why each may have left, citing “adverse effects” as one of the possibilities.

The treatments for the adhesive patch included white mustard seeds, asarum, and nepeta cataria ground and rolled into a ball. The ball was then placed onto an adhesive patch. After it is fixed to the adhesive pad, the practitioner sticks the patch on Governor’s vessel-14, both sides of Bladder-12, and one onto Bladder-13. The mixture is prepared in warm water, and nonallergic adhesive tape was used (probably non-latex). The application time lasted 1 hour.

The conventional medicine group ingested ketotifen combined with an unspecified “common” prescription, which was administered 5mg twice per day. It is important to note that ketotifen is often used for allergic reactions which affect the eye--not general allergic prescriptions. According to the MayoClinic, it is also often used in the prevention of asthmatic attacks. So, it is unclear as to the reasons for this prescription for the children participating in this research. The drug also has negative interactions with certain other antihistamine chemicals such as Pitolisant. The researchers did not specifically list what other medications the children were taking.

The common application group received the same herbal treatment as the Tianjiu group, but they didn’t comply with the specific dates as the Tianjiu group.

The researchers used several different methods to measure the efficacy of the treatments. They used a standardized system in which the efficacy rate is calculated by the clinicians subjective analysis of symptom remissions. This is usually separated into ineffective, effective, and cured categories. They also used a numbered scale of certain system in which each category could have a minimum of zero and a maximum of 3 points. They separated the categories into congestion, nose leakage, and sneezing. They included both self-reporting and inspection results. The visual analogue scale which measures the degree of pain in points from 0 to 10, 10 being the most painful, was also used. Lastly, the immunoglobulin E count (IgE) was also used to assess the number of antibodies in the body. A high IgE can indicate an allergic reaction while low IgE counts can indicate no reaction. When a person is no longer exposed to an allergen, the number may drop. As the researchers didn’t indicate the allergies, note the allergies, or even consider the possibility of reduced exposure, it is difficult to assess the value of any of the results of the IgE test.

Their specific information, group by group, including the results of the test are found in the table below:

Treatment group:	Conventional medicine	Tianjiu moxibustion	Adhesive patch group
Ages	8.38±2.2	8.24±3.53	7.88±3.36
Gender (Female: Male)	11:21	14:20	13:21
Disease onset (yrs)	3.44±2.37	3.15±2.2	2.97±2.1
Efficacy rate (number of ineffective cases)	71.88% (9)	91.18%(3)	38.24%(21)
Symptom point reduction (before after)	3.31±1.01	3.32±1.01	3.24±0.92
VAS (Before -- After)	4.28±1.63 2.22±2.01	4.59±1.54 1.03±1.57	4.47±1.58 3.26±1.85
Ige serum content (before/after)	205.8±200.21 144.37±181.62	144.86±151.31 74.7±114.77	203.61±216.1 181.78±200.23

The results of the test showed a higher efficacy in the Tianjiu moxibustion group in all tests. The conventional medicine group scored higher than the common herbal-adhesive patch group in all cases. Thus, this results, limitations considered, evidences the possibility that timely application of moxibustion during the dog days of summer may yield better results for the treatment of allergic rhinitis in children.

Language Focus:

1. 三伏天 Sān fútiān
2. 治未病 Zhì wèi bìng
3. 天灸药 Tiān jiǔ yào

Source: 冉传生, 冯佳, 刘晓琴, 龚江, 谭家万, 金银环, 夏生瑜。改良三伏天灸药方治疗小儿过敏性鼻炎的优越性研究。中医药信息, 37(3); 76-80.

