

Moxibustion Treatment for the Foot (Pain in the Achilles Tendon and the Sole)

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Complaints of pain in the base of the Achilles tendon and the sole of the foot are rare in our daily practice compared to those of lower back and knee pain. Nevertheless, once such a condition sets in, it is very difficult to treat it successfully with medical treatments such as pain killers, anti-inflammatory drugs, cortisone shots in the affected area, and application of insoles. Many patients end up suffering from pain for an unnecessarily long period with little relief.

Most patients with this problem visit an acupuncturist as a last resort after many unsuccessful medical procedures. This means that most cases we see are very chronic. Acupuncture can be the first choice for pain relief, regardless of the type of ailment. In treating this type of pain in the foot, however, one will face two difficult problems: 1) The base of the Achilles tendon and the sole are so sensitive that few patients can tolerate needle insertion in the affected area. It is simply too painful. 2) The sole in general has thick and hard skin, and this makes needle insertion extremely difficult. Even if it can be done, it will cause a lot of pain. So how does one treat pain in these areas?

Fortunately moxibustion is very effective for this type of pain in the foot. I will explain how I apply moxibustion. The size of the moxa cones should be larger than the standard "rice grain" size. The size of a soy bean is just right. If the pain is localized at the base of the Achilles tendon, chinetsu-kyu, the so-called "heat sensing moxibustion," should be used. In this technique moxa is burned on several tender points, or spots that are sensitive to finger pressure. The moxa cone is removed and extinguished as soon as the patient feels the heat. In this case the heat is mild and felt only on the skin surface (2-3 cones per point). If the pain is in the heel bone and the sole, tonetsu-kyu, or the so-called "penetrating moxibustion," should be used. In this method the moxa is burnt completely to the skin on the painful spot, and the heat is felt penetrating deep into the tissue. Although the skin on the heel and the sole is generally thick and hard, it is sensitive to heat from burning moxa. To moderate the intensity of the heat sensation

on the point, I usually press the surrounding area firmly with my thumb and index finger, and then pinch away the burning moxa cone just before it is completely burned. (This pressing and pinching technique is tricky, and one must learn the right timing so the heat sensation feels comfortable to the patient and you do not burn your fingers.)

Case History 1

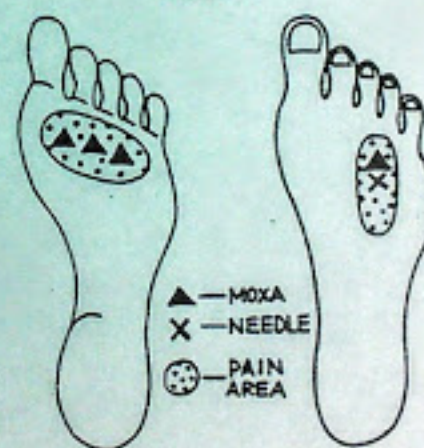
52 year old female (social worker)

First Visit: April 10, 1995

Chief Complaint: chronic pain and swelling in the distal plantar area (between the metatarsals and proximal phalanges) and between the third and fourth toes of the right foot. The patient has been suffering from this problem for over three years. Her family physician diagnosed her case as "Morton's plantar neuroma," an impressive name but he was unable to help her at all. Her daughter, a chiropractor, had supplied her with an insole or arch support for daily use, but this did not help either. She came to me as a last resort on her daughter's recommendation.

Other Complaints: hay fever, severe stiffness in the neck and shoulders, and slight pain in the right shoulder

Case 1



Treatment: For the pain in the distal plantar area, I used the tonetsu-kyu technique as shown in the figure, applying three cones on each point. For the pain between the third and fourth toes, or "Morton's plantar neuroma," I inserted

a needle as shown in the figure (40mm No. 2 stainless steel needles about 1cm deep). The needles were retained while I applied moxa very close to the needle (about 3mm away, 3 cones of chinetsu-kyu per point).

Results: The day after the first treatment, the patient noticed that the pain had already diminished by half. On the second day, she was able to go cycling during the day and go dancing at night (for the first time in three years). After the second treatment, which was three days later, the pain and swelling of the foot and toes disappeared

almost completely. On the following weekend she was able to hike 17 miles and cycle for 40 miles with her family without experiencing any problem. This was a surprise even to me. I didn't expect such a rapid recovery in this very chronic case. After all, she was completely freed from three years of suffering after just three sessions of my treatments on April 10, 13, and 21.

Case History 2

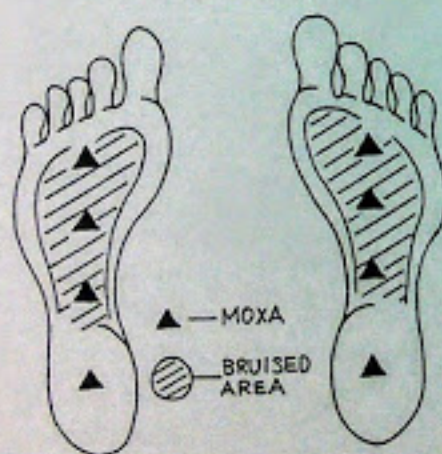
30 year old male (graduate student)

First Visit: September 21, 1995

Chief Complaint: Two weeks earlier, the patient got in such a rush that he jumped down some steps and landed hard on the lower landing. The impact was so strong that it caused internal bleeding and bruising in the entire soles of his feet. His doctor prescribed pain killers and anti-inflammatory drugs. These upset his stomach so badly, however, that he stopped taking them. He could hardly sleep because of the severe pain. He walked into my clinic supporting himself with a pair of crutches. His feet still showed big bruise marks.

Treatment: First I gave an acupuncture treatment to relieve tension in his whole body. Then, for the foot pain, I applied chinetsu-kyu on the sole as shown in the figure (3 cones per point). The entire sole was still very painful and sensitive so chinetsu-kyu was the choice instead of tonetsu-kyu. In this

Case 2



case even the very mild heat stimulation was enough to make the patient cry out repeatedly.

Results: Right after the first treatment, the patient walked out the clinic saying that the foot pain had already diminished substantially. When he came back for the second treatment five days later, he could walk without crutches. His third treatment was scheduled for a week after that, but three days later he phoned to cancel the appointment, saying that the foot pain and bruise had completely disappeared and that he could walk normally like

he used to. Thus his severe foot injury healed after only two sessions of moxibustion treatment.

Conclusion

In general, not only us acupuncturists, but also the public tend to regard acupuncture as the best choice for pain relief, regardless of the type of pain or condition. However, we should not forget about the great benefit of moxibustion for pain relief. Sometimes moxibustion can be far more advantageous and effective than acupuncture, especially for the treatment of foot pain and its accompanying symptoms. I hope that this article will inspire you to explore the tremendous potential of moxibustion.

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