Since 2012, I have been teaching how to treat cardiovascular disease (CVD) with acupuncture. After more than a decade of intense practical experience and specific knowledge on cardiovascular disease I was able to link every single heart disease to a corresponding TCM pattern. This made it possible to fine-tune my treatment of cardiovascular disease with acupuncture. There is a lot more that can be done with acupuncture for patients suffering from cardiovascular disease than we commonly think. Here are some of the reasons why.

“ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION IN THE HUMAN BODY HAS SHOWN THAT ALL IMPRESSIONS ARE FIRST PROCESSED BY THE HEART, AFTER WHICH THEY ARE RAPIDLY TRANSMITTED TO THE BRAIN VIA THE SYMPATHETIC NERVE SYSTEM.”

Research HeartMath San Francisco Rollin McCraty Director

This tells us that the heart has its own intelligence, and that this intelligence has no lesser importance than the functioning of the brain. All internal and external impressions are first processed by the heart. It then translates these stimuli into feelings and transmits them to the brain. The brain gives the explanation for surging emotions. In Western culture, we are not aware of this first step anymore. We mainly register the information processed by our brain. If all emotions are first detected by the Heart, the Pericardium, in its function as the protector of the heart, has to absorb and release these emotions during the night (Jue Yin). If Pericardium blood and Yin is deficient, the Heart can be damaged by these emotions.

Magnetic fields in the human body

Physiologically speaking, the various components within a human’s blood stream organize themselves around the vortex of the blood flow, which swirls through the blood vessel. The heavier red blood cells move closer to the centre of the vortex (and thereby rotate around their own axis). The lighter platelets are more on the outside of the vortex, with a thin layer of plasma along the vessel wall. Because the various components of the blood are separated by the centrifugal action, each part also moves at a different speed which results in a range of frequencies that resonate as a magnetic field. The heart is embedded in this flowing system, where it plays a supporting role: it not only moves but also stabilizes the flow. This magnetic field could be seen as the doorstep to our intuition or as the place of contact between the Heart and the outside world. This magnetic field interacts with the magnetic field of the persons around us. When this interaction is disturbed, we can damage our physical heart due to emotions and stress.

A healthy heartbeat is irregular, unpredictable, and prone to changes

The variability of the heartbeat is the strongest at young age and in healthy people (heart coherence). This defies the wide-spread concept of the heart as a machine, and gives rise to a more humane understanding of the heart’s physiology: the heart functions in a hemodynamic, non-linear and permanently fluctuating way.
Our heart rate, brain waves and breathing all have a certain rhythm

If there is high heart coherence, these rhythms resonate, and two or more oscillations of (almost) equal velocity cause a vibration. In that case, our brain, heart, nervous and endocrine systems communicate in an ideal fashion, and the body uses its energy efficiently. You feel comfortable and can think clearly. You achieve a "calm state of mind". This is a state of mind which protects us from illness.

There is some substantial scientific evidence that acupuncture can improve cardiac coherence

Bruce Jancin, Cardiology News, from the annual meeting of the American college of cardiology showed that acupuncture improves heart rate variability in cardiovascular diseases. Traditional acupuncture improves heart rate variability, and it may prove to reduce the risk of sudden death for patients with established coronary heart disease, a pilot study suggests. The blinded study with a sham-acupuncture control arm demonstrated that acupuncture accomplishes autonomic remodelling via sympathovagal modulation as reflected in increased heart rate variability (HRV), according to Dr. Puja K. Mehta of the Women's Heart Center at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles. The clinically meaningful improvements in heart rate variability in this pilot study lay the groundwork for a future large outcome-based clinical trial of traditional acupuncture in patients with known cardiovascular diseases.

Acupuncture has a direct effect on cardiac coherence through the influence on the Shen, the free flow of energy and especially because of its influence on the sympathetic nervous system.

How emotions and CVD are related

From the TCM point of view we know that prolonged sadness, frustration, anger, worries, anxiety, uncertainty, brooding, not being able or allowed to be yourself, can eventually lead to heart disease. On the other hand, cardiac disease gives rise to emotional problems such as depression, anxiety or panic attacks. In my clinical experience, patients are emotionally unstable as long as 3 to 12 months after a traumatic impact, medical intervention or surgery.

Heart disease can result in a sudden confrontation with death. Heart disease can also cause mortal agony. Heart infarction and heart surgery both destabilize emotion and the autonomic nervous system. Cardiac events can also trigger post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Not to mention that heart disease has an impact on whole families.

Po and Hun in post-traumatic stress disorder

In terms of Chinese Medicine, we can translate PTSD as Po (animal soul) and Hun (spiritual soul) separating and reacting autonomously as a means of self-protection. This is the instinctive reaction of the amygdala in the limbic system. The result is a Po-Hun oscillation that becomes an independent "entity" which can be seen as a Gui (ghost) coming into the clinical picture. This Gui causes compulsive behavior (Hun) or psychosomatic symptoms (Po). This symptomology can be treated with the aggressive energy points followed by the Yuan points of the affected organs.

Anxiety and depression

American Heart Association guidelines recommend screening cardiac patients for depression, but it may be time to also screen for anxiety, researchers reported. (seen in Medpage Today, Chris Kaiser, June 2014). Of the 210 patients who received a diagnosis, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) was
nearly as prevalent as depression (129 versus 143), according to Christopher M. Celano, MD, of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, and colleagues.

**With acupuncture, we can treat cardiac patients on a different level**

- Some drugs for calming the sympathetic nerve system have a blood pressure lowering effect. This can be a problem for patients with heart failure. Acupuncture can treat the sympathetic nerve system without lowering blood pressure.
- After a cardiac event the patient is anxious. Having a cardiac condition is very scary. Some of them faced death or are anxious to die. Acupuncture can stop the proprioceptive loop of pain-hypertension-fear-discomfort-depression.
- Acupuncture has an effect on the limbic system, so it can soothe and regulate emotions.
- Little options exist for patients suffering from non-cardiac chest pain (NCCP). Acupuncture can reset proprioceptive loops and emotional instability in patients whose condition is not recognized by most cardiologists, as they assume their complaints are merely psychological.
- Acupuncture reduces stress which is also very important in patients suffering from hypertension. This includes effects on the sympathetic nervous system and the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system (RAAS).

**Conclusion**

It is very important that we treat heart patients with good knowledge, be alert to any red flags and always use a gentle needling technique. The assets of acupuncture in integrative treatment of cardiovascular disease can be described as follows:

- Acupuncture promotes the circulation of Qi and Blood, and eliminates stagnation
- Calms the mind and regulates the emotions
- Sedates the sympathetic nervous system without inducing hypotension
- Treats lung disease (by eliminating phlegm) that can be underlying to cardiac disease such as atrial fibrillation and heart failure. (Western medicine treats heart and kidneys in heart failure. With acupuncture, we treat the Zang-Fu Heart, Lung and Kidneys. The Lung is the Prime Minister of the Heart and delivers the Qi that regulates the strength of the heartbeat).
- Positively influences edema, arrhythmia, blood circulation, pain, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia
- Last but not least: is an excellent measure of prevention

**Author**

Marie-Lore Buidin, physiotherapist and L.Ac, studied acupuncture in Belgium at the Jing Ming acupuncture college (1999-2002) with internship in China (Nanjing). She also trained with Master Li Ruheng (Nanjing) in Tai Chi Chuan Yang Style and Tai Ji Jian. She has specialized in treating cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease and psycho-emotional issues with acupuncture, in which she has more than 15 years of advanced knowledge and specific clinical experience. Since 2012 she is teaching her own courses in cardio acupuncture, emergency acupuncture, emotion and the heart and Taoist approach of emotional problems in the Netherlands, Zürich, Boston, Hartford, Victoria Canada and Belgium.