

# THREE CASE STUDIES

# MÉNIÈRE'S DISEASE

by Soma Glick

Ménière's disease is a disorder characterised by recurrent attacks of vertigo, with associated tinnitus and progressive deafness. The cause is unknown to Western medicine, though it may be related to a history of migraine headaches.

The attacks of vertigo are the most distressing symptom. They are usually severe, of sudden onset and may be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. The tinnitus is usually constant, but may vary in intensity and affect only one ear. There may be a feeling of fullness or pressure in the affected ear. Loss of hearing and deafness happen gradually.

I have had the occasion to treat three separate cases of Ménière's disease with good results. Here, I will present those three case histories to illustrate the similarities and differences in each case and the treatment principles applied, from the view point of Chinese medicine. Two of these cases had been previously diagnosed with Ménière's disease, while the other developed vertigo, which is the specific symptom of Ménière's, during the course of treatment.

A short history of the pathology, patterns of disharmony, signs and symptoms and the treatment principle for each person will show the application of traditional Chinese medical concepts in the light of this little understood illness.

## Case one

Mrs. B, female, age 52, had been diagnosed with Ménière's disease a year prior to seeking acupuncture treatment. She had initially been given steroids for the vertigo, followed by a prescribed diuretic and had been advised to completely eliminate salt from her diet. She had managed to reduce, but not totally eliminate her salt intake, and craved salt, sugar and white flour. She was maintaining a relatively simple and bland diet, with the exception of one glass of wine every night. She had been free of vertigo for 6 months prior to seeing me, but still experienced what she called white noise in her left ear, as well as light headedness at times. Her episodes of vertigo had been very severe and accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Although the diuretic had kept the vertigo in remission so far, she feared a recurrence of it and thought that acupuncture could help strengthen her system to prevent a relapse.

Mrs. B. struck me as a very strong woman, both in build and temperament. She had no history of major illness or injury and had raised three healthy children. Her build was tall and broad without being overweight. She expressed a

passion for tennis and the outdoors and had a tendency to overexert herself. Her complexion was ruddy with what looked like a malar flush.

*Temperature* : preference for heat, but hot at night.

*Digestion and elimination*: No specific digestive complaints but a tendency towards constipation; her urine tended to be dark.

*Menstruation*: Irregular and late menstruation for the last year; used to be regular and symptom free.

*Energy and sleep*: No sleep disorder; plenty of energy; difficulty getting up early in the morning.

*Head and face*: Frequent tension headaches in the parietal and occipital areas; tension in her facial muscles.

*Emotions* : She reported worry as her predominant emotion.

*Pulse* : Slightly deep, very slippery; left side softer than the right.

*Tongue* : Swollen and fully covered with a thick, white to yellowish coating.

*Diagnosis* : Internal wind and damp-phlegm accumulation.

*Point prescription*: Yinlingquan SP-9 and Fenglong ST-40 for the damp-phlegm; Taixi KID-3 and Yifeng SJ-17 to anchor the wind, all needled bilaterally. Tinggong SI-19, Tianrong SI-17 and Houxi SI-3 on the left side (affected ear); Waiguan SJ-5 and Xiaxi GB-43 on the right side. All these acted as local and distal points influencing the ear.

*Needling method*: In my practice I use Japanese needles, and do not seek to obtain deqi.

*Herbal prescription*: *Er Chen Tang* (Two-Cured Decoction) and *Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan* (Anemarrhena, Phellodendron and Rehmannia Pill). We used patent formulas because she didn't like the idea of drinking herbal decoctions.

When she returned a week later, she reported feeling better. Her tongue coating was much thinner and I could see some cracks underneath the coating. Her pulse was thinner and wiry. The noise in the ear had not changed.

I added Sanyinjiao SP-6 and Ququan LIV-8 to nourish blood and yin, and Fengchi GB-20 as an additional point for internal wind.

After three treatments she reported feeling less fullness in her ear and a decrease in the volume of the tinnitus. She also noticed that alcohol seemed to make it worse.

She then had to leave for three months and discontinued both the acupuncture sessions and the herbs. When she returned she reported that the noise had greatly increased, she felt extreme tension below her left ear, and she was experiencing frequent throbbing headaches at the temples.

She also had hot flushes throughout the day. Her tongue appeared redder and more coated, and her pulse was slippery and wiry.

We resumed the same point prescription once every two weeks, omitting Sanyinjiao SP-6 and Ququan LIV-8 and adding Rangu KID-2 and Yinxi HE-6.

We also replaced *Er Chen Tang* with *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction) and kept *Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan*.

After only two treatments, the headaches, hot flushes and the tinnitus were greatly reduced. After another month, all the symptoms were gone and her doctor told her to stop the diuretic. At this point, I replaced *Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan* with *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* (Six-Ingredient Pill with Rehmannia).

I continued to see her once a month for follow up. After three months, her menstrual period returned for the first time in almost a year. A month later, she experienced a recurrence of light headedness.

We again did three sessions back to back and all symptoms subsided. She returned once a month, for several months, and reported feeling great. The noise in the ear became very low and she could keep it that way by avoiding salt, alcohol and noisy settings. Three years have elapsed now, and she is totally symptom free.

In her case, the combination of *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* and *Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan* proved to be the best formula.

### Case two

Mrs. W, female, 53, was diagnosed with Ménière's in December 2000 and sought treatment in July 2001. She had received steroid injections in her inner ear, was on a vitamin and bioflavonoids regimen and had been seeing a chiropractor. The severe vertigo episodes with vomiting and diarrhoea had improved, but the tinnitus was constant. She had been experiencing dizziness for a month and her energy was extremely low.

Her medical history revealed a severe ear infection in her thirties which had been treated with antibiotics. Since that time she had had recurring throat and sinus infections, also treated with antibiotics, about once a year. She was very sensitive to cold and her blood pressure was low.

**Digestion and elimination:** Easily bloated especially after eating sweet foods; bowels usually loose; scanty, darkish, frequent and urgent urination.

**Menstruation:** She had taken contraceptive pills for 20 years and had two healthy children; her menstrual cycle was regular but she had started bleeding heavily and spotting between periods in her late thirties; at 40, she was diagnosed with endometriosis and had a complete hysterectomy, following which, she started hormone replacement therapy (Premarin).

**Energy and sleep:** Her energy level was one of her main complaints; she had constant low energy with a marked drop of energy after meals; some improvement was noticed after she stopped drinking coffee; no problem sleeping.

**Head and face:** She used to get migraine headaches 20 years

ago; her vision was blurry when tired; constant tinnitus with a low pitch sound; still dizzy and nauseous at times; numbness on the right side of her face often preceded an attack; since November, there had been swelling and puffiness on the side of her neck in the region between Jugu LI-16 and Quepen ST-12.

**Other:** Palpation revealed oedema of both ankles.

**Emotional:** She reported an unhappy family life; both children were grown and gone; her husband was often angry and negative; she reported worry as her predominant emotion.

**Pulse:** Generally deep and soggy on the left but the guan (middle) position was excess and wiry; generally thin, deep and slippery on the right, with the right guan position minute.

**Tongue:** Pale with a purple tinge, swollen, toothmarked, with a thin white coating.

**Diagnosis:** Spleen and Kidney qi deficiency with water accumulation and stirring of Liver wind.

**Point prescription:** Fengchi GB-20, Zusanli ST-36, Sanyinjiao SP-6 and/or Yinlingquan SP-9, Taixi KID-3 and/or Fuli KID-7 (depending on sensitivity), all needled bilaterally and Zhongji REN-3 or Guanyuan REN-4. Tinggong SI-19, Yifeng SJ-17, Houxi SI-3, Wangu SI-4 and Zhongzhu SJ-3, Xingjian LIV-2 and Taichong LIV-3, all on the right side (affected ear). Neiguan P-6 and Diwuhui GB-42 on the left side.

**Herbal formula:** *Liu Jun Zi Tang* (Six-Gentleman Decoction) and *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction) in decoction.

She immediately sensed a positive change in the way she was feeling. After the third session, she went a whole week without any nausea or vertigo, but on the fourth session, she reported some low back pain and more swelling of her hands and feet, as well as more fullness in the ear. I decided to add a patent formula called Sea of Qi (*Qi Hai Hao Fang*) which is designed to vitalise Kidney and Spleen yang. She fared relatively well with the new herbal regimen and an acupuncture session once a week for two months. There was no dizziness or vertigo, her elimination was considerably improved and her energy level was much better. She still experienced intermittent tinnitus, and lots of bloating and gas.

After 8 weeks, she suddenly had a severe attack of vertigo, accompanied by nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. The tinnitus was also increased and her energy became very low. At this point, I decided to change *Liu Jun Zi Tang* to *Di Tan Tang* (Scour Phlegm Decoction), still combined with *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin*. The acupuncture prescription stayed more or less the same. It took 3 weeks for her condition to stabilise again. Although she was not experiencing any vertigo, dizziness or nausea, she still complained of low back pain, urgent urination and occasional urinary retention and began feeling more congested and bloated. I increased the dosage of the patent medicine Sea of Qi and after two weeks the urinary symptoms subsided and her

energy increased. Shortly thereafter, she experienced a severe episode of sinus infection, which we treated with herbs. When she recovered, she resumed the original herbal treatment and reported feeling better than she'd had in a long time. The most recent infection had given her the impetus to change her diet and start a regular exercise program.

For the last year, she has seen me for treatments every six weeks and continues to take a maintenance dose of the combination of *Di Tan Tang* and *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* as decoctions. She takes the Kidney tonic as needed and has remained free of all her symptoms.

### Case three

Mr. M, male, age 34 came to see me in June 2000 with complaints of low energy, allergies, digestive disorders and sinus congestion.

He had a history of respiratory infections as a child and had received extensive antibiotic treatments. He lived in the middle East when he was 18 and came back to the United States with a severe eye infection and a stomach virus. Since then, he'd had chronic canker sores (aphthous stomatitis). He reported being very sensitive to cold although he felt warmer at night. He had had palpitations and even panic attacks a few years earlier and a tendency to skin outbreaks such as eczema, urticaria and boils. Since college, he had been feeling run down.

*Digestion:* Loose stools or diarrhoea for the last 10 to 15 years; low appetite with gas and bloating; his digestion had been even worse when he was following a vegan diet and he had resumed eating meat a few years earlier.

*Energy and sleep:* Chronic low energy with a major energy drop after lunch; his worse time was around 3 to 4pm; poor sleep, waking frequently throughout the night and difficulty falling back to sleep.

*Head and face:* No history of migraines but he complained of frequent visual dizziness and low pitched tinnitus; he reported seeing spots and floaters in his field of vision; severe tension in his jaws; sore throats.

*Emotional:* He reported sadness as his most recurrent emotion; his memory seemed good but he had difficulty concentrating for any length of time; he had experienced deep depressions, mood swings and what he called "fatigue attacks".

*Musculo-skeletal:* Chronic tightness in the neck and shoulders; more tension on the right side, the same side as the ear with tinnitus; his arms tended to "fall asleep" easily.

Mr. M struck me as a very sensitive and delicate person with a pale complexion, a malar flush and dark circles under his eyes. Palpation revealed swollen tonsillar glands on both sides. At the time of our first visit, he had an attack of canker sores on the right side of his mouth, as well as loud ringing and crackling noises in the right ear, and complained that his sex drive was very low.

*Pulse:* Slightly deep and thin and wiry; the right pulse was deeper and more slippery.

*Tongue:* Narrow, pale and cracked.

*Diagnosis:* Lung and Spleen qi deficiency with lingering pathogenic factor; Kidney yin and yang deficiency with empty heat.

*Herbal formula:* *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction) to be taken in the morning and *Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan* (Anemarrhena, Phellodendron and Rehmannia Pill) in the evening, both in patent medicine form.

*Point prescription:* Zusanli ST-36, Hegu L.I.-4, Neiting ST-44, Taichong LIV-3, Taixi KID-3 and Xiaxi GB-43 needled bilaterally. Moxa on Baihui DU-20. Jiache ST-6, Xiaguan ST-7 and Houxi SI-3 on the right side only.

The following week, he reported an improvement in his digestion and energy and his stools looked firmer. The ringing in his right ear was diminished. We continued with the same regimen which kept his condition somewhat improved for about a month. We had replaced Jiache ST-6 and Xiaguan ST-7 with Tinggong SI-19 and Yifeng SJ-17 after the canker sores had healed.

There was a worsening of his condition in the 5th week of the treatment. The area around his right ear became swollen, he had a lot of phlegm and congestion in the nasal passages and the right nostril was totally blocked. He became constipated and had more gas and bloating. His pulse was forceful and wiry on the left and flooding on the right.

I diagnosed a wind heat invasion affecting the ear and sinuses and gave him an appropriate herbal formula and point prescription. Because his glands were still swollen the following week, I decided to follow up with *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) for another 2 weeks before resuming our primary treatment. He became acutely aware that a lot of his symptoms were worsened by sugar and dairy foods, and attempted to maintain a sugar and dairy free diet as much as possible.

We continued this treatment at the rate of 2 sessions a month. He felt that the acupuncture and the herbs generally gave him more energy, kept the ringing at a tolerable volume and improved his digestion and elimination. For a period of about 3 months, he had the longest stretch of feeling well and sleeping better. However, every 3 to 4 weeks, he came down with some kind of inflammation, whether attacks of canker sores, outbreaks of eczema, eye inflammations or sinus infections.

Some personal problems of a stressful nature took him out of town and we discontinued our treatments for a while. When he came back to see me, he had suffered an episode of extreme dizziness and vertigo with nausea. His medical doctor diagnosed it as Menière's. He was still feeling dizzy and nauseous 2 weeks after the episode. There was fluid in the inner ear and the ringing was much louder. He was also coughing up yellow and sticky mucus.

*New herbal formula:* *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction) combined with *Qing Qi Hua Tan Wan* (Clear the Qi and Transform Phlegm Pill).

*New point prescription:* Fengchi GB-20, Baihui DU-20, Fenglong ST-40, Sanyinjiao SP-6 or Yinlingquan SP-9, and Taixi KID-3 or Fuliu KID-7 bilaterally. Tinggong SI-19, Yifeng SJ-17, Houxi SI-3, Wangu SI-4, Xingjian LIV-2 and Taichong LIV-3 on the right side. Neiguan P-6 and Diwuhui GB-42 on the left side.

Along with the acupuncture and herbal treatments, he decided to try some neuro-therapy injections. He continued weekly acupuncture treatments for another 2 months and remained free of symptoms the entire time. He then moved out of town. I have stayed in touch and he tells me that he is seeing another acupuncturist and continues to take the herbs. We had changed *Qing Qi Hua Tan Wan* to *Liu Jun Zi Tang* (Six-Gentleman Decoction) when the phlegm started to clear up. He hasn't had any recurrence of vertigo in the last 6 months. His energy, digestion, elimination and tinnitus have all greatly improved and remain stable as long as he stays on a diet free of sugar or phlegm-producing foods such as dairy.

### *Conclusion*

The similarities between these three cases lie in the dual deficiency patterns of Kidney yin and yang. Each case exhibited both cold and heat patterns. The deficiency of yang can explain the damp accumulation and the rising of phlegm blocking the orifices, mainly affecting the ear and sinuses. The deficiency of Kidney yin can affect Liver yin and lead to patterns of heat and stirring of Liver wind.

The herbal formula common to all cases has been *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin*, accompanied by a herbal formula which transforms phlegm.

I found that needling points unilaterally worked best for patterns of one-sided headaches or one-sided ear disorder. Supporting the Spleen qi also proved to be a key factor in treating this illness.

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