

PMS & Cramps...Relief Is At Your Fingertips

by Theresa M. Danna

7 It's the day before your big job interview and you suddenly feel that familiar pain in your abdomen. "Oh no, it can't come tomorrow!" But you know it will because you always get that certain jab a day before the flow starts. What are your choices? Postpone the meeting? No way! Take the medicine that makes you drowsy? Can't chance it. Take no medicine and sit scrunched up during the interview? Help!

There is another option, one which has relieved Asian women since ancient times: acupressure. Unlike acupuncture, a treatment that involves needles and must be administered by a licensed doctor of Asian medicine, acupressure is applied with your own fingertips whenever you feel discomfort.

How Is ASIAN MEDICINE DIFFERENT?

In the same way Americans accept that our body has a respiratory, circulatory, reproductive, nervous and excretory system, Asians believe our body has an energy system. This natural

energy, called *Chi*, flows along 12 main meridians, or pathways, which we cannot see. The stronger our *Chi*, the healthier we are.

Some energy is cool, known as *yin*, and other energy is hot, known as *yang*. Yin is characterized as "female" and yang as "male", although everybody

related directly to our symptoms.

WHAT HAPPENS TO ENERGY DURING OUR PERIOD?

If you experience PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome) and cramps, there could be one or more of three major energy imbalances happening in your body. The first is overall

from working or playing too hard for too long or from living through prolonged emotional stress.

"In the modern world, we are inundated with thousands of different kinds of toxic substances," claims Dr. Law. "Our bodies often don't know what to do to disarm and excrete them. Thus, they tend to collect in the liver and fatty tissues."

Since the liver is where our blood is cleansed and stored, a woman with hot blood might experience an early period of bright red blood or spotting between periods. Hot blood is sometimes described as "reckless."

PRESSURE POINTS TO RELIEVE CRAMPING

There are three points located on your legs and feet which can be pressed at the moment you are experiencing the cramps. (See illustrations page 13).

A) Inner side of your leg, below your knee the distance of about four finger widths.

B) Inner side of your leg, above your ankle the distance of about four finger widths.

C) Inner side of your foot, under the arch.

PRESSURE POINTS TO RELIEVE STAGNATION

There are two sensitive points on the tops of your feet that will effectively get your energy flowing again. You can press these points any time during or between periods. Dr. Law claims that these two points will also help you make decisions and long-range plans. Press lightly the first session and then gradually increase the pressure as your body becomes stronger.

D) At the top of the foot, in the groove between the bones leading to the big toe and to the second toe. The bones join, making a "V" shape.

When an imbalance occurs, energy becomes blocked along certain points

has both yin and yang energy regardless of gender. Yin is calm energy and yang is wild. The goal in Asian medicine is to balance yin and yang so that our *Chi* flows steadily and freely.

When an imbalance occurs, energy becomes blocked along certain points along the meridians. We can then experience mental symptoms ranging from anxiety and irritability to insomnia or nightmares. Some people develop physical symptoms such as a dry cough and pale skin. To open the energy blockage, we can apply pressure with our fingertips to specific points

stagnation, often caused by prolonged stress or toxins (such as chemicals or too much sugar) in our food and air.

"When the vital energy of the body begins to stagnate, the blood stagnates as well," explains Duane Law, a licensed acupuncturist in Los Angeles. "This stagnation leads to irritability, depression, and cramping that peaks just before the menstrual flow begins."

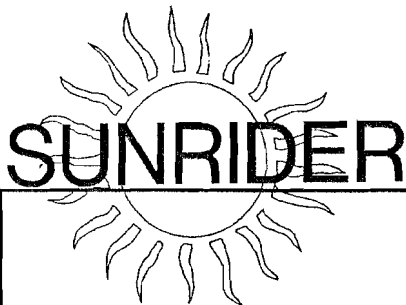
Once the flow begins for these women, the blood is dark in color with some clots.

A second type of imbalance is weak blood, which can happen when we eat too much cold or preserved food.

"When the blood is weak, it has difficulty nourishing the tissues," says Dr. Law. "When the body loses even more blood during menses, the nearby tissues suffer from the deficit. The result, cramping after the flow begins."

Women with weak blood have a scanty flow with pale blood, and they might experience late or skipped periods.

The final major imbalance is hot blood. In Asian medicine, the word "hot" is used to describe blood which has been weakened by toxicity or possibly by exhaustion



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Press at the junction as shown.

E) Top of the foot, in the groove between the bones leading to the little toe and fourth toe. Again, press where the bones join.

PRESSURE POINT TO INDUCE CALM

This calming point is effective relief any time you feel stressed out, not just when you have PMS or cramps. It helps build yin energy.

F) Inner side of leg, in the deepest hollow behind ankle bone.

HOW DO I DO ACUPRESSURE?

To locate the specific pressure point, slowly probe the general area with your thumb until you feel a tender spot. Some people feel a sharp burning sensation when they have found the point.

Once you have found the point, press as hard as you can bear for at least one full minute. Breathe slowly and deeply as you hold the pressure. Then gradually release the pressure, take a one minute break, and then start again. Try to get two to four minutes altogether on each acupressure point per session. You can perform all of the points on one leg first and then the other, or you can do both legs at once if it's more comfortable for you that way.

Sometimes it helps also to say to yourself, "I am now relaxed" or "good health is my natural state" as you apply the pressure. If feeling relaxed was a color, what color would it be? Imagine that color flowing throughout your body while you are treating yourself. You will be amazed at how quickly you calm down.

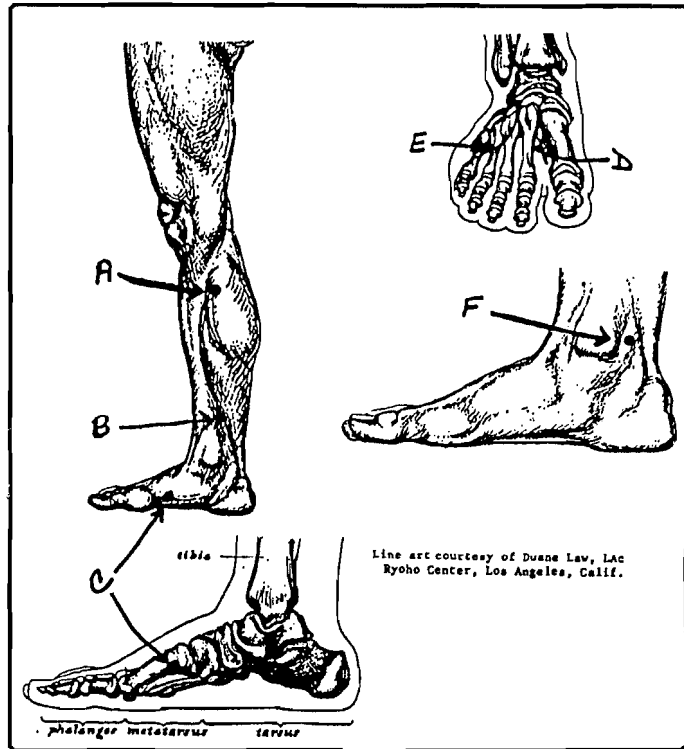
After the session, if you feel tired, drink a lot of water and rest

for awhile. You might try lighter pressure the next time to avoid "over-calming" yourself.

An important warning to keep in mind, also, is to **NEVER** perform acupressure on these points if you are pregnant.

YOU'RE IN CONTROL

Now that you are aware of the benefits of acupressure, you no longer need to panic the next time menstruation coincides with a major event. You can control the flow of energy in your body and thus ease the discomfort of PMS and cramps without drugs or worry. Now go pick out what you're going to wear to that interview tomorrow!

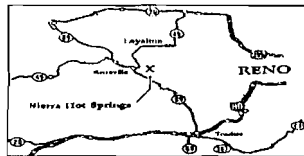


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