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A Review of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Trigger Finger Treatment

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Abstract

This study investigates the treatment of trigger finger using approaches in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The objective was to examine the effectiveness of various therapeutic methods, including acupuncture, Tuina massage, Gua Sha therapy, moxibustion, and Chinese herbal medicine. A review article methodology was employed, gathering and analyzing research from reliable sources related to the treatment of trigger finger using TCM. The results revealed that acupuncture combined with Gua Sha and Chinese herbal medicine effectively reduced pain, decreased inflammation, and improved finger function, particularly when integrated within a holistic treatment approach. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that TCM represents an effective alternative for the treatment of trigger finger and can be appropriately applied in conjunction with other treatment modalities.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), trigger finger, acupuncture, Gua Sha, moxibustion

1. Introduction

Trigger finger is a common condition that can occur in individuals of all ages. It is a disorder of the hand in which the affected finger cannot flex or extend normally, and it may involve a single finger or multiple fingers. Currently, the prevalence of trigger finger has been increasing among office workers due to prolonged repetitive hand use. This repetitive activity leads to friction between the flexor fibro-osseous sheath, the flexor tendon, and the annular fibrous pulley, resulting in inflammation, pain, tenderness of the palm, stiffness, catching, difficulty in finger movement, and locking of the finger in flexion, requiring the use of the other hand to extend it (Sirijaruwong et al., 2012)

Yixuan and Zhaoqing (2023) The symptoms of trigger finger are classified into five stages. Stage 0 involves pain during finger flexion. Stage 1 : Inflammation is characterized by pain at the base of the finger. In Stage 2 : Triggering, as the pathology becomes more chronic, the tendon sheath thickens, leading to a clearer obstruction of the movement of the flexor tendon. Stage 3 : Locking presents with increased obstruction of tendon movement. Stage 4 : Flexion

Contracture occurs when the pathology becomes more chronic, causing severe pain during finger movement and resulting in adhesion of the flexor digitorum superficialis tendon during.

From the perspective of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), trigger finger is classified as an injury involving the tendons and muscles. Treatment based on TCM serves as an alternative option that can relieve pain, promote blood circulation, relax muscles, and reduce swelling of the hand. This article summarizes and analyzes the therapeutic effects of TCM in treating trigger finger, with the aim of disseminating knowledge, promoting its integration with other therapeutic modalities, and providing information to support physicians in making treatment decisions. It may also contribute to the advancement and improvement of treatment approaches in the future.

1.1 Research Objective

To review, analyze, and synthesize existing knowledge regarding the application of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in the treatment of trigger finger.

2. Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher followed the procedures described below.

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review and synthesis of research findings related to the treatment of trigger finger using traditional Chinese medicine.

Population and Sample

Target Population

This systematic literature review focused on research reports involving male and female patients diagnosed with trigger finger.

Sample

The sample consisted of synthesized knowledge on the treatment of trigger finger obtained from systematically collected and verified research reports published between 2010 and 2024.

Inclusion Criteria

- Research reports that investigated the treatment of trigger finger using traditional Chinese medicine.
- Research reports published between 2010 and 2024.

Exclusion Criteria

- Research studies unrelated to the treatment of trigger finger.
- Duplicate studies retrieved from electronic databases.

Research Instruments

The research instrument used in this study was a data collection form designed for gathering information on the treatment of trigger finger using traditional Chinese medicine.

Research Procedures

- Reviewing relevant research documents.
- Analyzing and organizing the data.
- Summarizing the information obtained from related documents.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using research articles and books published between 2010 and 2024.

Data Analysis

The researcher examined, analyzed, summarized, and organized information gathered from field data and relevant documents. The findings were synthesized and presented using descriptive content analysis through descriptive research.

Statistical Analysis

Relevant documents were examined, analyzed, summarized, and organized, and the findings were presented using descriptive content analysis through descriptive research.

3. Research Results

This study was conducted as a review article, with the aim of serving as a research case study and disseminating knowledge on the treatment of trigger finger using traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), in order to support the development of treatment approaches. The researcher collected the following information:

1. Acupuncture

Clinical studies on the treatment of trigger finger using TCM showed that acupuncture and related techniques were more effective in reducing pain and improving tendon function compared with standard treatments such as steroid injection or surgery. The techniques used included conventional acupuncture, ultrasound-guided acupuncture, and warm acupuncture. Most studies reported better treatment response and greater safety in patients receiving these acupuncture techniques compared with control groups. (Jiang et al., 2022)

2. Tuina Massage

Tuina massage in pediatric patients effectively restored thumb function (Qiang & Ying, 2020). Furthermore, warm acupuncture combined with Tuina massage provided significantly better therapeutic outcomes than hormone-block injections and medications (Cai, 2010). Specific point-pressing techniques along the radial bone also provided greater reduction of

tendon inflammation compared with topical herbal paste application (Lu & Tan, 2020). These findings support the concept that physical therapy based on TCM can enhance blood circulation and improve tendon function.

3. Gua Sha

Gua Sha applied along meridian pathways and tender points, together with relevant acupuncture points, yielded better functional recovery of the fingers than Tuina massage applied only at tender points (Qing & Qian, 2020). In addition, Gua Sha combined with acupuncture and moxibustion along the Taiyin and Taiyang meridian pathways and tender points was found to be effective in relieving pain and restoring normal finger movement (Wang et al., 2020).

4. Moxibustion

Studies on moxibustion showed that it reduced pain more effectively than local steroid injections in patients with Trigger Finger Chinese moxibustion, which involves multiple herbs with anti-inflammatory and blood circulation enhancing properties, reduced recurrence rates more effectively than micro-surgical treatment alone (Yuekun, 2015). Moreover, moxibustion combined with Huoxuezhitong San herbal powder application produced notable improvements in pain relief and finger function (Wang & Xie, 2016).

5. Herbal Medicine

Recent research in Thailand has increasingly focused on identifying active compounds in herbal formulations that relieve muscle pain, and many herbal prescriptions were found to contain key medicinal plant constituents (Chokchaisiri et al., 2025). Additional studies demonstrated that herbal treatments achieved therapeutic effectiveness rates of up to 90%. The herbal formula Tao Hong Si Wu Tang was reported to improve mobility and reduce tendon abnormalities more effectively (Tao, 2017; Liutao, 2017). Herbal soaking and herbal poultice applications also contributed to reducing tendon inflammation at the wrist and provided favorable therapeutic outcomes (Wei, 2019).

Summary and Discussion of Results

Based on the findings of this study, the treatment of trigger finger using traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) was found to be highly effective. TCM therapies including acupuncture, Tuina massage, Gua Sha, moxibustion, and Chinese herbal medicine provided distinct advantages and therapeutic strengths in alleviating symptoms. The reviewed research indicated that TCM provides significant benefits in treating trigger finger, particularly in reducing pain, decreasing inflammation, and restoring normal finger mobility. From the data analysis, acupuncture emerged as the most effective treatment modality, showing superior outcomes in pain reduction and inflammation control. This was followed by Tuina massage, Gua Sha, moxibustion, and Chinese herbal medicine. In addition, TCM treatments were associated with minimal adverse effects compared with steroid injections or surgical procedures.

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