

Sharing a client: how nutrition and acupuncture combine to help IBS

York-based nutritional therapist **SALLY DUFFIN** frequently shares clients with **TIZIANA BERTINOTTI**, a highly qualified TCM acupuncturist. They find that clients thrive by experiencing both modalities of treatment – and they have particular success with chronic digestive complaints, pain and fatigue issues. Here Sally shares a typical case history.

The client is a 23-year-old woman who is coming in because of fatigue and IBS, with constipation, pain, wind, bloating and abdominal discomfort.

As therapists we are taught the advantages of cross-referring clients to other practitioners; however this doesn't always work out in practice, as patients may struggle to afford more than one therapy simultaneously, or feel unable to cope with more than one technique at a time.

When collaborative working does happen, the results can be enlightening and empowering for both client and therapists.

Tiziana and I began cross-referring clients to each other several years ago while based at the same multi-disciplinary clinic. We recognised the need for a team work approach to holistic health, with foods, supplements, energy medicine and physical/manipulative therapies each having their place in supporting a client on their health journey.

This case history documents the progress one shared client made while following a functional nutrition plan and receiving Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) acupuncture treatments for digestive health.

Health history

Our client had been experiencing low energy and IBS symptoms of constipation, pain, wind and

abdominal discomfort for roughly eight years since the age of 15, when her parents separated. Around this time she also suffered a bad cold and cough virus and had never felt well since.

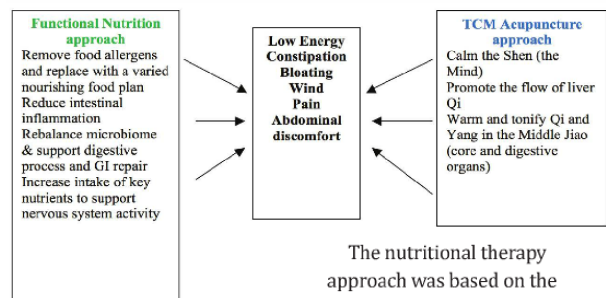
She took a food intolerance ELISA test during her teens and discovered gluten sensitivity: cutting this out of her diet did initially make a considerable difference to both bowel movements and bloating, but the benefits were not sustained.

A few months before starting her treatments, the client moved house; this depleted her energy levels even further and worsened her IBS. She was aware of her tendency to hold on to stress in her stomach, and of not finding time for relaxation. Due to low energy levels she was no longer enjoying regular exercise; this in turn was worsening her IBS.

Her diet was typically very good, with plenty of home-prepared meals, fresh vegetables, wholegrains and regular fluid intake of water and herb teas.

Eastern and Western interpretations of the case

From the TCM acupuncture point of view, the client had a mixture of "patterns of disharmony", with stress and chronic tension being key contributing factors. Tiziana's approach was multi-faceted and also used her advanced training in auricular acupuncture. She focused primarily on calming the



client's mind and sympathetic nervous system while improving the flow of stagnated Qi through her digestive system and liver.

Several ear and body points were used to Calm the Shen (ie calm the mind), including Shen Men, Point Zero, Sympathetic and YinTang. This combination of body and auricular acupuncture had a profound impact on the client's parasympathetic nervous system, allowing her to deeply relax and engage in healing.

The disposition towards stress and worry was also reflected in her pulse and tongue diagnosis which highlighted liver Qi stagnation with heat. Various points such as the 4 Gates were used to promote the flow of liver Qi.

The client's abdomen often felt cold to the touch, a sensation which tied in with Kid and Sp Yang positions on her pulse being fine, deep and deficient. Moxa and needling were used to warm and tonify Qi and Yang in her core and digestive organs: the needles conducted the warmth from the moxa, helping it penetrate deeply into her system.

The nutritional therapy approach was based on the functional medicine "4 Rs" for digestive health: Remove, Replace, Reinoculate and Repair – alongside support for her nervous system with specific nutrients and simple deep breathing relaxation techniques.

Similarities between the Western and Eastern interpretations are visible: nutritionally supporting the parasympathetic nervous system and its influence on the gut/brain axis equates to Calming the Shen, while reducing inflammation and enhancing digestion and elimination parallels the acupuncture effects of promoting Liver Qi and warming and tonifying the digestive organs.

Functional testing

The client was keen to take another food intolerance test as she felt new food sensitivities had developed. The test highlighted multiple food reactions, the strongest being to cows' milk, cranberry, oats, pea and egg white. Other animal milks were also quite strongly reactive, alongside several nuts and grains. The presence of multiple reactions suggested



compromised gut integrity and emphasised the importance of Repair and Rebalancing.

A comprehensive food plan was devised focusing on as much variety and interest as possible and including warming, cooked foods that are easy to digest. Food sources of magnesium, B vitamins, essential fats, zinc and vitamins A and D were highlighted to ensure optimal dietary intake of nutrients to support digestive repair, energy production and stress handling.

Contrasting recommendations

The client had an early start to her working day and had gotten in the habit of drinking a protein powder and soya milk smoothie for breakfast. At first I recommended she continue enjoying a smoothie, but make it herself with nut milk, ground flaxseeds, berries and greens such as spinach. As a stand-alone recommendation this seemed fine, but Tiziana had identified patterns of cold and stagnation in her digestive system which were not conducive with such a cold breakfast! She switched to a more warming breakfast and enjoyed buckwheat porridge with ground seeds, almond butter and cooked apple instead.

Supplements

This client was already taking several supplements, including

various fibre products. Some contained oats and other food extracts which she reacted to. We replaced them with just two products to begin with: a multi-strain comprehensive high strength probiotic supplement, and a capsule blend of digestive herbs including ginger, fennel, clove, peppermint, papaya and cardamom for their anti-spasmodic, anti-inflammatory and carminative properties.

Client progress

A few weeks after starting the nutrition plan and acupuncture treatments, our client went on holiday to America. She was initially apprehensive about the trip, but after some careful forward planning, coped well with the eating plan and enjoyed a wide range of fresh salads, vegetables, meats and fish, while avoiding the majority of trigger foods.

At her three-month nutrition consultation, the client reported consistent improvements in her sleep, energy levels, constipation, pain and bloating. She was enjoying regular high intensity exercise again and had changed her routine to make time for regular relaxation in the evening. These improvements had steadily accumulated, interrupted only briefly by a mild upset in bowel function caused by changes to her routine and body clock following

the flight home from America. The acupuncture sessions quickly resolved this imbalance and relieved her symptoms.

Maintaining well-being

The client now supplements with a magnesium citrate and B vitamin formula to provide ongoing support for energy levels and dealing with stress, and continues to enjoy monthly acupuncture treatments to maintain her well-being and digestive comfort. In her own words, she now feels "much more energised and empowered! After many years of discomfort I can now enjoy life to the full!"

Benefits of working together

Collaborating on clients has given us both a broader insight into each other's modality. There is deep respect for the other's approach and a shared motivation and interest in helping the client. From our experience of co-working, the benefits of sharing a case can really come into play when a barrier to progress crops up. The missing element in one's own practice – for example knowledge of nutrition, therapeutic exercise or bio-energetics – can be provided by the other practitioner; thereby sustaining the client's progress and momentum.

About the practitioners



SALLY DUFFIN, BSc
Nutritional Medicine, CNHC Reg, mBANT, began working in the health food industry in 1999 and qualified as a nutritional therapist

in 2009, after six years part-time study. She runs a busy practice in York, offering one-to-one consultations and workshops, and enjoys writing health and nutrition articles for various websites and publications. Sally is committed to supporting students of nutrition: she is the Nutrition Clinic Supervisor and Module Leader for Clinical Practice at Northern College of Acupuncture and a tutor in the Education Team at Nutrigold Ltd, the independent naturopathic nutritional supplement company.
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TIZIANA BERTINOTTI:
BHSc Acupuncture, PGCert Chinese Herbal Medicine, Adv Dip Acupuncture, Dip Bowen Therapy, MBACC, BA Hons, and PGCE,

qualified through a four-year full-time course in Traditional Chinese medicine at the Australian College of Natural medicine, Brisbane, Australia. She graduated with the Bachelor of Health Science – Acupuncture, with the award for "Most Outstanding Student Practitioner of Acupuncture" in her year. She worked as a practitioner of Chinese medicine in various clinics in Brisbane as well as on a cruise ship as the official Resident Acupuncturist at Sea, before returning to England to set up a practice at York Traditional Acupuncture. Within the Acupuncture for Childbirth Team (ACT), Yorkshire (www.actyorkshire.org.uk), she specialises in treating morning sickness, in preparing the body for labour, turning a breech baby, inducing labour and in post-natal care.
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