

FROZEN SHOULDER

Frozen shoulder is the result of inflammation, scarring, thickening, and shrinkage of the capsule that surrounds the normal shoulder joint. It is called “frozen shoulder” because it restricts motion and it may be the result of tendinitis, bursitis, or rotator cuff injury. It affects mostly women between the ages of 40 – 60.

Initial symptoms are stiffness and pain followed by complete immobility. If left untreated, frozen shoulder will usually resolve itself in 12 – 18 months after it “thaws.” Conventional treatment involves the use of anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS), steroid injections (cortisone), and physical therapy. In extreme cases, surgery may be required.

Acupuncture Definition and Treatment of Frozen Shoulder

TCM defines frozen shoulder as “50 year shoulder” because of the average age of the person afflicted. Acupuncture has proven to be a very effective treatment because it releases the blockage of blood flow and qi. The basic premise of TCM states that when qi is allowed to flow freely and blood is invigorated, transformation occurs.

Acupuncture treatment usually involves 3 phases. Initial treatment is 3 times per week for 2 – 3 weeks followed by the second phase of once per week for another 2 – 3 weeks. Then the patient is evaluated and if required, treatment will continue once per week for another 2 – 4 weeks. Rehabilitative exercises are incorporated in the recovery phase.

Case Study

A 54 yr old woman who worked as a ferry captain sought treatment for severe shoulder pain and stiffness and was diagnosed with frozen shoulder by her MD. Despite receiving physiotherapy, massage therapy, and taking up to 20 anti-inflammatory tablets per day, she experienced very little relief.

She pursued acupuncture and received 3 treatments per week for 4 weeks. Although she was advised to continue treatments once per week for an additional 3 weeks, she had to return to her job. However, when she returned 7 weeks later, her shoulder mobility had drastically improved.

Summary

Generally speaking, most patients with frozen shoulder will experience improvement in mobility within 2 – 4 weeks after 6 – 12 TCM treatments. Full recovery usually requires 12 – 20 treatments.