

## STROKE

Conventional medicine defines a stroke as a sudden loss of brain function due to the interruption of blood flow to the brain. Although it can be caused by several cerebrovascular diseases, all can result in nerve damage in the brain.

Stroke is the most common neurologic disability in Western countries. Statistics Canada states that 80% of Canadians have at least one risk factor for heart/or cerebrovascular disease: smoking, lack of physical activity, overweight, high blood pressure, or diabetes. It is estimated that a Canadian dies of heart disease or stroke every seven minutes.

There are 2 types of strokes. The most common is ischemic which occurs 80 – 85% of the time and hemorrhagic which occurs in 15 – 20% of the cases. An ischemic stroke happens when a blood vessel becomes obstructed by the build up of plaque, calcium, scar tissue, blood clots or narrowing and hardening of the arteries. A hemorrhagic stroke occurs to due to a rupture in a blood vessel in the brain.

Both types of stroke exhibit the same symptoms:

- Weakness on one side of the body
- Tingling or numbness on one side of the body
- Facial paralysis on one side
- Slurred speech
- Inability to speak
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Vision problems
- Lack of coordination
- Loss of consciousness

### TCM Diagnosis and Treatment of Stroke

In the TCM perspective, there are six principal syndromes of stroke: “wind”, fire heat”, “phlegm”, “blood stasis”, “qi deficiency” and “yin deficiency with yang over-activity.” Each syndrome is associated with a particular set of symptoms. For example, a patient with “wind” syndrome would feel dizzy and have tremors and spasms, while a patient with “fire heat” would be irritable with a fever and rapid pulse.

Because TCM first uncovers the root cause by identifying the pattern, the treatment for stroke conditions will vary. For instance, if the syndrome is “phlegm with blood stasis”, the treatment would aim to remove the phlegm and blood stasis to unblock the meridian and promote recovery.

### Case Study for Hemorrhagic Stroke

A 76 yr old male was suffering from weakness after a hemorrhagic stroke. His appetite was poor, his feet were cold and he had lots of mucus in the morning. These symptoms revealed a pattern of “yang qi deficiency” and “phlegm and blood stasis”.

After receiving 3 acupuncture treatments over 10 days combined with Chinese herbal medicine, he was able to move his left shoulder and his appetite and energy levels increased. After another 5 treatments over a 2 ½

week period, he was able to move his hip. His treatments continued along with muscle strength training, and after 8 weeks, he was strong enough to walk with a walker, bathe himself, and live without assistance.

### **Case Study for Ischemic Stroke**

After having an ischemic stroke 3 months prior, a 46 yr old female was treated for painful swelling in her right hand, minor speech slurring, and mild dizziness.

The pain in her hand was diagnosed as “shoulder hand syndrome”, a possible complication from the stroke.

After 2 acupuncture treatments, the pain and swelling decreased significantly, and after receiving 5 treatments over a 3 week period, her right hand had returned to normal. Treatments continued another 6 weeks at which time her dizziness was gone and she was able to speak with improved clarity.

### **Summary**

Because TCM uses pattern differentiation in diagnosing and treating stroke patients, the results have proven to be quite successful. When acupuncture and herbal medicine is combined with conventional medicine using a multidisciplinary approach including speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, the patient can expect the best prognosis.