# ACUPUNCTURE FOR INTRACTABLE ESOPHAGEAL SPASM

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To review a case of intractable esophageal spasm treated with acupuncture alone.

**Case:** A 22 year old Caucasian female presented to the head and neck surgery clinic with a 2 year history of dysphagia. Patient had difficulty swallowing solids and liquids and received an extensive work up including two upper gastrointestinal endoscopies with esophageal biopsies as well as a barium swallow. Biopsy results revealed no evidence of Crohn’s esophagitis or eosinophilic esophagitis on pathologic review, with only mild evidence of gastroesophageal reflux disease. A barium swallow showed diffuse moderate esophageal spasm. The patient was treated with multiple modalities including anti-reflux medication, swallowing therapy, and endoscopic esophageal dilatation without any benefit. Although the reflux was controlled, the dysphagia persisted. The patient was referred to the head and neck surgery clinic for other modalities of treatment for her dysphagia.

**Methods:** The patient was evaluated by the senior author for diffuse esophageal spasm and treated with acupuncture alone. Acupuncture points included: the topographic points for esophagus and gastric antrum in the right (dominant) ear, Shenmen point in the left (nondominant) ear, meant to correspond with more emotional or spiritual elements, and Governor Vessel 20 (Dumai 20) on the scalp.

**Results:** The patient’s symptoms of dysphagia completely resolved within 24 hours. She is able to swallow both solids and liquids normally, without any further intervention. The patient returns to clinic every three months for repeat acupuncture.

**Conclusion:** Acupuncture may be a viable alternative for select patients who’ve failed conventional treatment for diffuse esophageal spasm.

## CASE HISTORY /WORK-UP

**Case History**

- A 22-year old Caucasian female presented to head and surgery clinic with a 2 year history of dysphagia
- Dysphagia sx worse for soft foods like ice cream and liquids
- Aggravated by quick eating and drinking
- Empiric medical management unsatisfactory
- Past medical history relevant only for Crohn’s disease, controlled by 800mg PO mesalamine BID

**Work-up**

- 2x upper gastrointestinal endoscopies with esophageal biopsies showing only squamous mucosa with mild irritative changes, negative for any organic pathology
- Barium swallow: diffuse moderate esophageal spasm

**Figure 1.** (left) photo of patient’s right ear (dominant ear), during acupuncture treatment.

**Figure 2.** (right) photo of patient’s left ear (nondominant ear), during acupuncture treatment.

## OUR INTERVENTION

- The patient was evaluated by AFJ for diffuse esophageal spasm and treated with acupuncture alone
- Acupuncture points included:
  1. The topographic points for esophagus and gastric antrum in the right (dominant) ear
  2. Shenmen point in the left (nondominant) ear, meant to correspond with more emotional or spiritual elements (below)
  3. Governor Vessel 20 (Dumai 20) corresponding with curiosity and open-mindedness, esp. re: changing perspectives about disease (see right)

## ACUPUNCTURE : BRIEF REVIEW

**Principles of Acupuncture**

- By stimulating specific points, can regulate yin, yang, qi along meridians
- Yin and Yang: continuum of energy that flows in body between two opposite poles, Yin and Yang
- Meridians: fourteen lines that carry Qi through the body

**Acupuncture & Otolaryngology**

- small research field: search terms in PubMed yield only 48 articles
- 2015 Clinical Practice Guideline for Allergic Rhinitis offers option for acupuncture for allergic rhinitis patients who are interested in non-pharmacologic therapy (Grade B level evidence)
- Acupuncture for post-tonsillectomy pain in children proven to be effective in randomized, controlled, single-blinded study (Gilbey et al. 2015)

**Acupuncture in Esophageal Spasm**

- Yin et al. 2010 review showed that effects of acupuncture of electroacupuncture (EA) on GI motility were fairly consistent
- Shuai et al. 2008 showed different effects of EA on esophageal motility and serum hormones in cats with esophagitis

## CONCLUSIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acupuncture may be a viable alternative for select patients who’ve failed conventional treatment for diffuse esophageal spasm.

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