

# Auricular Acupuncture and Chinese Dietary Counselling in the Treatment of Insomnia

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## Abstract

**Statement of the Problem:** *Insomnia is a sleep disorder that regularly affects millions of people worldwide. Individuals with insomnia find it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. It commonly leads to daytime sleepiness, lethargy, mood swings, anxiety, stress and a general feeling of being unwell, both mentally and physically.*

**The purpose of this study** is to demonstrate the results of a treatment using auricular acupuncture associated with Chinese dietary counselling. A second goal is to demonstrate why erroneous eating habits, specifically during dinner, can be one of the causes of insomnia.

**Methodology & Theoretical Orientation:** *To prove that insomnia can be treated with auricular acupuncture and Chinese dietary counselling, a retrospective research of over 1500 patients' records was done. 55 (3.66%) of these patients were selected based on having insomnia diagnosis in their records and had performed previous treatment with auricular acupuncture associated with Chinese dietary counselling.*

**Findings:** *Of the total amount, 30 (83.33%) considered their insomnia as a main symptom which affected their lives daily. After the first month of treatment (four sessions), more than 80% of the patients felt improvement of their insomnia symptom.*

**Conclusion & Significance:** *The majority of patients who had undergone auricular acupuncture associated with Chinese dietary counselling for the treatment of insomnia had been completely cured or had significant improvement. The study also concluded that patients who not compromised with the dietary changes did not achieve the same positive results as those who agreed with them.*

**Keywords:** *Insomnia, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Auricular Acupuncture, Chinese Nutritional Therapy.*

## INTRODUCTION

Insomnia is a widespread problem around the world. Insomnia has significant negative impact in daily functioning and is associated with work absenteeism, considerable impairment of quality of life, and increased medical and societal costs. The pathology is also frequently associated with a variety of psychiatric disorders, especially depression and anxiety.[1-3]

Nowadays, 36,5% of the Brazilians suffer of insomnia. It corresponds to more than 73 million people. [4]

Despite the increase of the problem and its consequences over the world, sleep disorders can be

conquered with simple factors. Changing sleep habits, diminishing stress and anxiety, and being aware and treating medical conditions, such as apnea, can restore restful sleep for many people. [1-3]

For those who do not achieve success with these measures, Western medicine would recommend cognitive behavioral therapy, as well as the use of sleep inducer medications. [1-3]

Sleeping pills are commonly prescribed to treat sleep disorders, and they aim is to help a patient to achieve sleep and stay asleep. In general, the medical recommendation would be to suspend the use of sleep

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medications in a few weeks, but there are medications approved for long-term use. [1-3]

Some studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of medications to control sleep may vary between patients. Hence, is common for patients to search for alternative solutions for the insomnia issues. The use of Traditional Chinese Medicine and other ancient techniques is common. [5-9]

The cornerstone of this study, as well as other studies of the author, is the treatment in the *root-level*, focused on the energy imbalances analyzed by ancient medical tools such as Traditional Chinese Medicine. To do so, the author used a case of one specific patient as a cornerstone; this case was previously stated in other studies of the author. The patient presented symptoms of leg pain, and searched to the author's clinic after performing treatment with general anti-inflammatories for the pain with little improvement. The author then started a treatment with Chinese dietary counselling, systemic and auricular acupuncture, and performed the diagnosis of the patient in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

The patient was diagnosed with Kidney-*Yang* deficiency, and the treatment was started for treating this energy imbalance. After 10 sessions of acupuncture, the patient returned to be reevaluated, and told the author he had perceived great improvement not only of the symptoms of leg pain, but also an impressive reduction of his intraocular pressure. The author was not aware, but the patient was bearer of glaucoma, and was performing treatment with Western Medicine drugs and eye drops for 40 years, without significant improvement in his condition, always with the intraocular pressure appearing around 40mmHg. After the 10 sessions of acupuncture, his intraocular pressure diminished to 17mmHg, for the first time in his life. [15-18]

The author observed the results in this patient, and used this kind of reasoning, treating the energy imbalance and not only the symptom, in the treatment of several other patients and pathologies, in this study, the influence in patients with insomnia. . [15-18]

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that is possible to treat insomnia with Chinese Nutritional

Therapy associated with auricular acupuncture. A second goal is to demonstrate why erroneous eating habits can be one of the causes of insomnia.

The third goal was to treat the patients in the root-level and analyze the results of a form of treatment energy-based, centered on the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

### METHODS

A retrospective research of over 1500 patients' records was done. 55 (3.66%) of these patients were selected based on having insomnia and previous treatment with auricular acupuncture associated with Chinese dietary counselling, and 36 of these 55 patients were reached for the interview. The objective was to understand the positive role of both techniques as methods for insomnia treatment.

The data presented in this article, was already presented at the "AAMA's 24TH Annual Symposium", in Atlanta, USA, in April 2012. A second presentation was done on the "AAICON-2012" '15th National Conference of Acupuncture Association of India at India International Centre (IIC)" in New Delhi, in India, in December 2012. It was also presented at the ICMART Congress 2015, in Bali, Indonesia.

Patients who had clinical symptoms of insomnia were selected, based on their historical reports on the clinic. With the use of questionnaires, those patients were interviewed by a third-person researcher, after being submitted to a treatment based on the use of Chinese dietary counselling and auricular acupuncture, associated with apex ear bloodletting.

### RESULTS

Considering the 36 patients as the total, 30 of them, or 83.33% considered their insomnia as a main symptom, and the reason why they would search for acupuncture treatment.

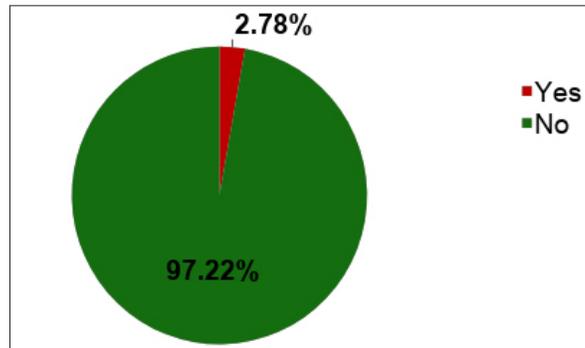
In Table 1 is possible to see that 25% of patients already had some improvement after the first auricular acupuncture session. These positive results also increased with the number of acupuncture sessions. After the first month of treatment (four sessions), more than 80% of the patients felt improvement of their insomnia symptom. In the majority of patients, more than 94% of patients evaluated the treatment as excellent or good.

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**Table 1.** *Insomnia Improvement Self-evaluation by Number of Sessions*

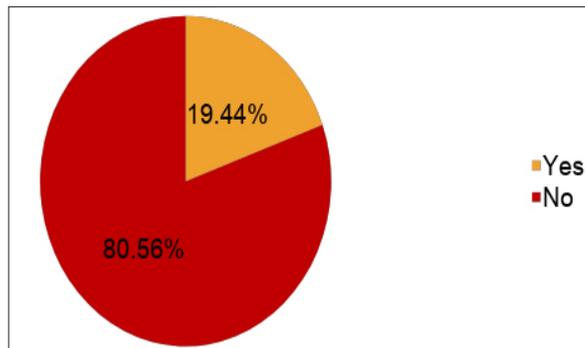
# Patients	%	improvement	no improvement	# sessions
9	25	√		1
5	13.89	√		2
10	27.78	√		3
5	13.89	√		4
6	16.67	√		+4
1	2.77		√	

From the studied patients, only one had a history of hospitalization justified by insomnia before his acupuncture treatment, as described in Figure 1.



**Fig 1.** *Hospitalization of Insomnia Patient's before Auricular Acupuncture Treatment*

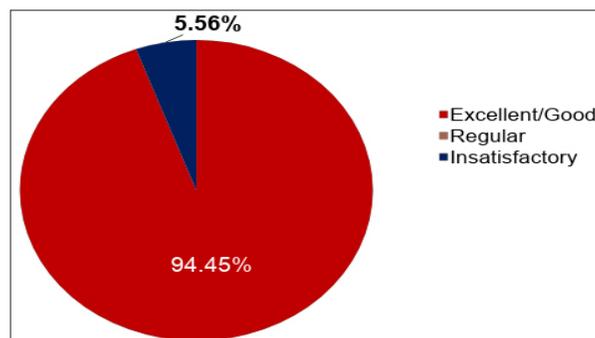
Almost 20% of the patients had previous non-acupuncture treatment, as it is possible to see in Figure 2.



**Fig 2.** *Patients with Previous Treatment Before Auricular Acupuncture Treatment*

As the patients themselves reported, they were looking with different approaches in order to treat their sleep disorders, avoiding the serious side effects related to the sleeping pills. It is possible to see in

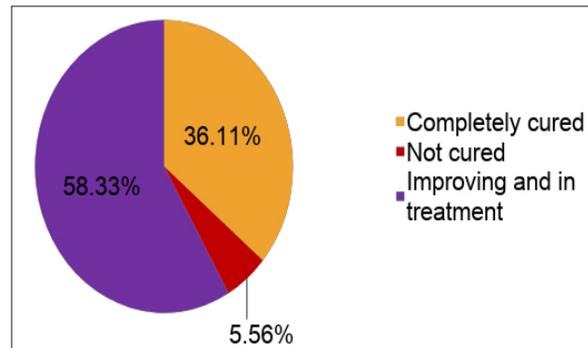
Figure 3, the evaluation of the acupuncture treatment by the patients, which showed that the results of the treatment were positive. More than 94% would recommend their acupuncture treatment to others.



**Fig 3.** *Insomnia Patients' evaluation of Acupuncture Treatment*

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Finally, as represented in Figure 4, a third of patients felt they had been completely cured and two thirds of them felt strong improvement on their insomnia symptoms.



**Fig 4.** How Patients Evaluated their Auricular Acupuncture Treatment as a Cure for their Insomnia.

## DISCUSSION

### Western Perspective

Western Culture life style and choices has a close relation with the alarming insomnia numbers. Sleep disorders are constantly associated with weight gain, and a person with sleep disorders will have a 27% chance of developing overweight or being obese. [1-3,10]

National Sleep Foundation also concluded women have the double chances of suffering from insomnia. The disorders may have a genetic association, once approximately 35% of patients with insomnia have a family history of the disease. [10]

Sleep disorders are also associated with mental illness, such as depression; in general, 90% of patients suffering from depression also have insomnia. [11]

The use of medications is also substantial. Approximately 10 million people in the U.S. use prescription sleep aids. [12]

The consequences of sleep disorders affect society as a whole. National Sleep Foundation also figured out that 60% of people have driven while feeling sleepy and 37% admit to having fallen asleep at the wheel in the past year. [10]

This data can easily be connected with the data provided by National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which show that 100.000 vehicles accidents occur annually related to sleepy drivers. An estimated 15.000 deaths occur each year in these accidents. [13]

The financial expense regarding sleep disorders is also sizeable. The institute of Medicine estimates hundreds

of billions of dollars are spent annually, regarding medical costs directly linked to insomnia. [1]

However, this circle of problems regarding the quality and quantity of sleep is not a constant in the rest of the world. In China, for example, the prevalence of insomnia was 15.0%, a lot smaller than in Brazil (36,5%). [14]

Younger Chinese adults appear to suffer from insomnia more than older adults, what might be associated to the fast urbanization, which would create work hours and routines similar to the Western countries' in a lot of ways. [14] The widespread use of media, such as computers and smartphones, is also a factor that might increase insomnia risk. [14]

In Western Medicine, insomnia treatment is usually done with medications, specifically benzodiazepines medications or non-benzodiazepines hypnotics, such as Zopiclone, Zolpidem, Zaleplon. There are even other medications also used, such as antidepressants, Trazodone and antihistamines. [2]

There are two types of insomnia. Acute transient insomnia and chronic insomnia. Patients with chronic insomnia are often affected in their lifetimes in a different way that those with acute transient insomnia. It is statistical that patients with chronic insomnia have impairment in cognition, mood and performance, which may affect not only the patient himself but also his family members, friends and caretakers. [2]

### The Tree Metaphor

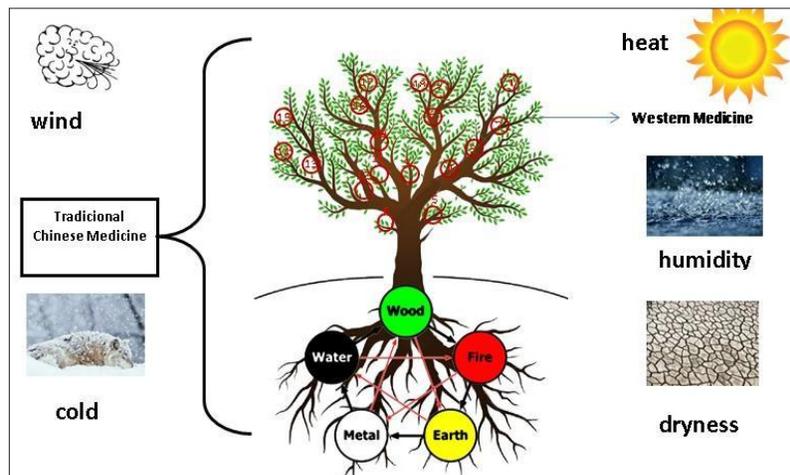
For comprehending the process of insomnia in Traditional Chinese Medicine, the reasoning has to be opposite to what is normally done in medical teaching. The metaphor of the tree is a great way to place how

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Western medicine works in relation to other ancient medical traditions, and the differences between these perspectives. [15-18]

The tree has a trunk (Figure 5) with several branches. Each branch represents a medical specialty and each leaf that comes out of each branch represents the symptoms and diseases of each specialty. In the case of insomnia, it is usually treated in the neurology

branch, not specifying the energy imbalances of the patient, treating only the symptom. This visible part is the object of study and practice in the Western medical profession because of the curriculum offered in the medical schools around the world. The focus is to treat each leaf in each specialty. However, there are other points of view, which come from other traditions such as Traditional Chinese Medicine. [15-18]



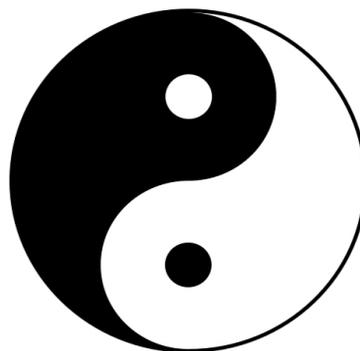
**Fig 5. Schematic Drawing of the Views of Western Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine**

Looking to the figure, the parts of the tree that are below the earth, invisible to the naked eye, are the roots of the tree. The Five Elements theory and the *Yin* and *Yang* theory are based on the root of the tree, and the energy-based treatment for insomnia will base on that.

### **Yin, Yang, Qi and Blood**

It is impossible to understand the concepts and perspectives surrounding Traditional Chinese Medicine without understanding the concept of *Qi* and the concept of *Yin* and *Yang*. According to the wise Chinese men, everything in the world is constituted by energy. This energy or vital force is known as *Qi*, and it is present in the smallest and biggest things. [19]

*Yin* and *Yang* are two complementary principles of Chinese philosophy. They would represent the need for balance present in the world, and the *Qi* is ruled by *Yin* and *Yang* forces. The symbol, presented in Figure 6, represents the opposition and cycle of these two forces. *Yin* is negative, dark, and feminine, *Yang* positive, bright, and masculine. Their interaction is thought to maintain the harmony of the universe and to influence everything within it. These two energies are always seeking for balance, what means they are always interacting in a cyclical matter. When *Yin* is in its utmost, *Yang* will start to grow, and the opposite is true.



**Fig 6. Yin and Yang**

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The concepts of *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi* and Blood, and the dynamic balance between these four forces is part of the health constitution of a patient. The author developed a study associating the treatment of the *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi* and Blood energies, to the resolution of several symptoms and diseases (Figure 7). This study was presented by the author, in 2015, at the Acupuncture Research Conference at Harvard Medical School, in Boston, USA. The summary of the study states the

following: "Treating all energy imbalances, we would treat all symptoms, at the same time. It would not be necessary to recognize the disease or symptom. The physician part would be to identify the imbalance and treat it, and with the energy balance restored, the symptoms would disappear consequently. Considering this type of reasoning we would treat all diseases of all specialties at the same time, treating the root of the problems and not only the symptoms." [15-18]

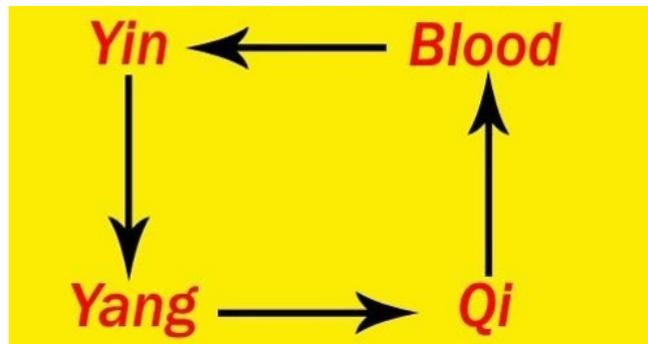


Fig 7. Yin, Yang, Qi and Blood Schematic Relationship

### The Yin and Yang Cycle of Sleep

In TCM, sleep is part of the natural rhythm of *Yin* and *Yang* in the body. In the concept of *Yin-Yang*, *Yin* represents passive forces while *Yang* represents active forces. [20]

The ancients observed two phases of constant cyclical change where *Yin* changes into *Yang* and back into *Yin* again (Figure 8). From 6AM to 12PM, the *Yang* energy is increasing until 12 PM corresponds to Utmost *Yang*, from 12 PM to 6 PM it corresponds to *Yang* within *Yin*, from 6 PM to 12 AM, the *Yin* energy is increasing until

12 AM corresponding to Utmost *Yin*. From 12 AM to 6 AM the *Yin* energy became *Yang* again, restarting the cycle. As always this is a continuous movement, and never static. [20]

From the health standpoint, the basis of well-being is the appropriate balance of *Yin* and *Yang*. The imbalance of *Yin* and *Yang* are believed to cause illness. Regarding sleep, the Yellow Emperor, a classic book with the essential texts of TCM, states, "When *Yang* is depleting and *Yin* is abundant, one's eyes are closed. When *Yin* is depleting and *Yang* is predominant, one is awake." [21]



Fig 8. Yin Yang Cycle

In TCM, *Qi* flows through 12 principal meridians within the body in a 24-hour cycle. When *Qi* flows through a specific principal meridian, it takes around 2 hours to vitalize and strengthen the organ system associated to that particular meridian before continuing to subsequent meridians. [21]

The 24-hour-meridian-cycle initiates on the Lungs between 3-5 AM, after, it comes the best time to evacuate, between 5-7 AM, and it represents the maximum of energy of the Large intestine, eliminating the waste of the previous day. Next, between 7-9 AM, it is necessary to eat; the maximum of energy is on the Stomach. After, between 9-11 AM, it is necessary to digest the food, therefore, the maximum of energy is on the Spleen-pancreas. Between 11 AM to 1 PM, good blood distribution is needed for work and an attentive mind, the maximum of energy is on the Heart. Between 1 to 3 PM, it is time for a new meal; the maximum of energy is on the Small intestine. Between 3 to 5 PM, it is time for the elimination of the urine to clear the blood; the maximum of energy is on the Bladder meridian. From 5 to 7 PM, the maximum of energy of the Kidney. From 3 to 7 PM, when the Kidney meridian is healthy and working properly, the person will feel more energy at that time, not tired. From 7 PM to 9 PM, the maximum of energy is on the Pericardium. From 9 PM to 11 PM, the maximum of energy is on the Triple Burner. From 11 PM to 1 AM, the maximum of energy is on the Gall bladder. From 1 AM to 3 AM, the maximum of energy is on the Liver. [20]

Seventy percent of heart attacks occur when the Heart meridian is in its repair period. [20]

The ideal time to sleep in accordance to the meridian clock is from 9PM-11PM to 5AM. If a patient has a sleep disturbance at a certain hour repeatedly, it is an indication that one paired organ system may require attention. [20]

For example, if the patient is able to sleep and wake up between 1 and 3 AM, this means that there is an imbalance on the Liver meridian. The Liver meridian has a property of cleansing of blood and processing of wastes. If the patient has nights when he cannot sleep between 1 AM and 3 AM, this means that waste is not being processed by his Liver meridian properly, and it acts as an irritant to the body causing insomnia. [20]

If a person wakes up between 3 and 5 in the morning, this means that the Lung meridian is imbalanced. The lungs are the first organs of the day that are up

for repair and maintenance. They begin loosening the poisoning waste between 3 to 5 AM, and when the patient awakes at this time, it means the Lung meridian is trying to expel the loosened waste. If you are coughing in the morning, this indicates that your diet and lifestyle needs changes. The Lung can be imbalanced by feelings of sadness as well, and this may be indicative of the patient's sadness and depression. [20]

### Shen

Another influencer in the sleep is the Shen. Chinese Medicine considers Shen to be one of the "three treasures" that constitute life: Jing, the essence; *Qi*, the life force; and Shen, the spirit. [19] TCM views the spirit as an integral part of our health and our well-being and cultivation of the spirit is considered essential for health maintenance. [19]

Shen lives in the Heart, and if Shen is disturbed, there may be insomnia. Shen is specifically said to live in the Blood Vessels, part of the system of the Heart, and to be nourished by the Blood. In TCM pathology, therefore, deficient Blood may fail to nourish the Shen. Alternatively, Heat, of various Organs, may disturb the Shen. [19]

There are different classifications of mechanisms of Insomnia, according to Traditional Chinese Medicine. It could be disharmony between Kidney and Heart, deficiency of the Heart and the Spleen, the retention of *Qi* in the Gall bladder as well as phlegm disturbance or food retention. [19,22-24]

### Diagnosis of Energy Imbalances

During the first appointment, the doctor should observe some factors in order to comprehend the disturbances associated to the insomnia symptom. The most common disturbances were a combination of *Yang*, *Yin*, Blood deficiency associated with Heat retention. The second most common was the combination of *Yang*, *Yin* deficiency associated with Heat retention, and thirdly just *Yin* deficiency.

In order to diagnose the energy deficiencies, the first process is through a questionnaire, presented in the Table 2. [15-18]

Patients have different energy imbalance and their treatment plan should be individualized. The corrections of the imbalances in the patients treated was done with auricular acupuncture, apex ear bloodletting and Chinese dietary counselling.

**Table 2.** How to Diagnose Yin, Yang, Qi, Blood and Heat Retention Imbalances?

<b>Question</b>	Does the patient have a daily bowel movement?	Does the patient have excessive sweating during day?	Does the patient feel cold in the extremities of the body? (Cold feet or hands)	Does the patient feel hot in the extremities?	Does the patient has dry mouth, bleeding gums, bad breath, acne and/or redness in the skin, abdominal pain, micro hematuria, or itching?
<b>Meaning</b>	The lack of daily bowel movements can mean Blood deficiency.*	This could be a symptom of Qi deficiency.	Commonly, this is a sign of Yang deficiency.	Commonly a sign of Yin deficiency.	Commonly this is a sign of Heat retention.

\*Blood deficiency can be understood as anemia in the energy level. As Blood deficiency may take years to appear in the laboratory exams, the patient with constipation and a normal complete blood count (CBC) can still be considered a patient with Blood deficiency, according to TCM, depending based on the symptoms he/she may present.

**Chinese Nutritional Therapy**

Chinese Nutritional Therapy is based on the idea that the foods have energies as well as everything in the universe. To have a balanced diet, a person has to consume the energy of the foods in a healthy and balanced way. [25]

One great example of these deficiencies is Blood deficiency. When a person has Blood deficiency, the nutrition of all organs and meridians is compromised, creating a general weakness in the energy of the body. One of the causes of Blood Deficiency is due to nutrient absorption problems, related to Spleen-pancreas deficiency, very common in people who consume lots of raw food, dairy products, sweets, ice liquids, and have excessive worry. These foods are very common in the Western diet and are often considered healthy foods. [25]

So, one way to avoid Blood Deficiency for these causes is to consume more boiled or stewed foods, to avoid cold beverages, as is used in China where people ingest only warm liquids and avoid dairy products, and that can be one of the causes of the lower incidence of Insomnia in China population compared to Western countries. [25].

Internal heat buildup occurs when there is an excess of energy on a direct way or a deficiency of energy on an indirect matter, causing internal Heat growth. [25]

The foods that cause internal Heat formation are frying, egg, chocolate, honey, coconut, alcoholic beverage, dairy products, especially when the cheese is melted. Other foods like pepper, garlic, ginger, cloves

and cinnamon, are also some foods that can generate Heat. [25]

The quality of the diet in the energy level will also influence sleep. One of the problems is associated to food stagnation. [25]

According to the teachings of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the gastrointestinal tract stops working after 6 PM. When the patient eats after 6 PM, the energy of the food is not digested until the next day. [25]

Therefore, it is important to advise patients who have insomnia to dine earlier, preferably between 5-6 PM, and the foods should be those that have Yin energy, which are all those that grow under the ground, such as potatoes, carrots, yams, onions and radishes. [25]

Red meat should be avoided during dinner. It is very common for the patient to repeat the food eaten for lunch at dinner. In Brazil, it is very common to eat rice, beans, red meat, lettuce, tomato and potato chips. If this person repeats lunch at dinner, what could be correct would be only the potato, but even then, being fried, it will generate internal Heat, and could lead to insomnia. [22-25]

It is very common for the patient to have insomnia because of erroneous eating habits, especially at night. Foods that have Yang energy can unbalance the normal cycle of Yin and Yang energy flow during the day and at night. These foods are those that grow up the earth, such as rice, beans, corn and popcorn. [25]

For example, patients often use chamomile tea to try to sleep at night and eat lettuce. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chamomile can induce

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the formation of internal heat if taken chronically, so it should not be routinely indicated for treatment of insomnia. There is also a myth regarding eating lettuce at night to treat insomnia. As it grows above the earth, it has *Yang* energy and tends to imbalance the normal *Yin* and *Yang* cycle, triggering insomnia.[22-25]

As it is the intention to rebalance the *Yin* and *Yang* energies to obtain the improvement of the symptoms of insomnia, it is important to take precautions to avoid foods that have *Yang* energy at night, where *Yin* energy predominates. Most patients have insomnia because of the eating habits, and other energy imbalances related problems. Without treating the root of the problem, even the intake of sleep-inducing medication will not be effective if the cause of the problem is not treated accordingly. [25]

### Auricular Acupuncture

Auricular acupuncture, is an acupuncture technique similar to reflexology, and is speculated that the technique works because groups of pluripotent cells contain information from the whole organism and create regional organization centers representing

different parts of the body, through recruitment of more cortex cells dedicated to specific areas of the body. Thus, stimulation of a reflex point in the ear can relieve symptoms of distant pathology with a reliable duration. [26]

The auricular acupuncture points used to treat the patients who were suffering from insomnia are showed on Figure 9. The points were used to treat their energy disturbances according to TCM, always with the intention, to balance the internal energy of *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi*, and Blood. [15-18]

To treat the *Yin-Yang* disharmony, the Kidney point was used. To treat the *Qi*, the Lung and Liver point, and for the Blood, the Spleen point.

The point marked for apex ear bloodletting, is related to the treatment of Heat retention. If a patient does not present improvement only with auricular acupuncture points, the procedure of apex ear bloodletting is necessary. The dietary changes will also have great influence on the results of the auricular acupuncture sessions. [15-18]



Fig 9. Auricular Acupuncture points

### Arndt-Schultz's Law

The medications used to treat insomnia in Western Medicine could work at first, but with chronic and constant use, as all medicines are metabolized in the Liver meridian, it would cause a formation of internal Heat. First, by the direct action of the drug in the liver, and secondly, indirectly, by the reduction of the vital energy caused by the use of high-concentrated drugs, according to the Arndt-Schultz law. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, when there is a decrease in vital energy, an internal Heat buildup is caused, that may lead to insomnia. [15-18]

Therefore, it is important to be careful when chronically prescribing a medication in high concentrations, because the medication itself may be causing the imbalance that is generating and maintaining the condition being treated. [15-18]

The Arndt-Schultz's law (Figure 10), originally formulated in 1888, states the effects of different drug concentrations on an individual. The rule states that for all substances, small doses stimulate, moderate doses inhibit and overdoses kill. According to this law, highly diluted drugs improve organic processes, while high concentrations harm health. [15-18]

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Arndt-Schulz were the researchers who proposed this hypothesis that curiously coincides with homeopathic theory. Currently Maturana and Varela, two Chilean researchers, have proved this and much more with respect to the size of the dose in the role of stimulating or inhibiting the vitalities of living beings. [15-18]

Homeopathy is a holistic medicine, which uses specially prepared, highly diluted substances, with the aim of triggering the body's own healing mechanisms. In Brazil, homeopathy has been considered a medical specialty by the Federal Medical Council since 1980. [15-18]

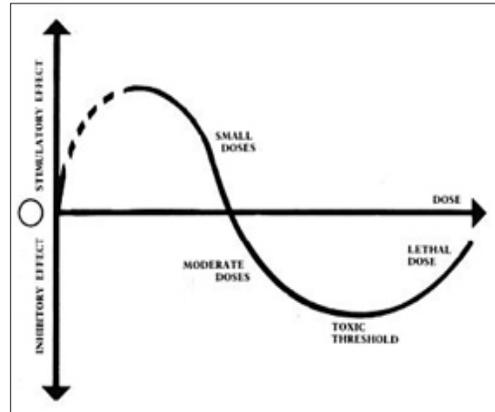


Fig 10. The Arndt-Schultz's Law

### CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that auricular acupuncture and Chinese dietary counselling is another tool that can be used in the treatment of insomnia and without the use of medication, which may be another factor that can maintain the energy imbalance, maintaining the insomnia condition. The comprehension of the energy present in the food and the variation of *Yin* and *Yang* energy during night and day, for the treatment of insomnia, is important to realize the dietary orientations on the patient, when the patient presents this condition.

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