



**The Successful
Application of
Distal Acupuncture
for Facial Pain**

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Introduction

In an earlier issue of this journal (Summer, 2017), I discussed the distal treatment of head pain. The present article will build on the principles addressed in that article to cover meridian distribution of the face, detail powerful distal points that effectively treat large areas, and provide acupuncture protocols for facial pain. Although not the focus of this article, point combinations are included to address pathologies of the sense organs.

Meridian Distribution Along the Face

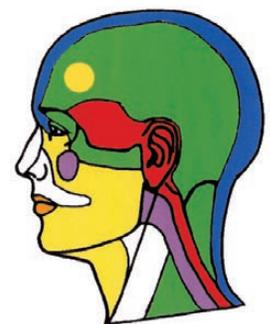
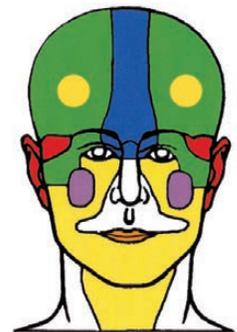
The previous article addressed the meridian distribution and treatment of head pain ranging from the occipital region through to the forehead. Here we will focus on the regions from the eyes down to the chin, and the ears inward to the nose.

Whereas the head is dominated by the Gallbladder meridian, the face is a sea of *yangming*, the Stomach and Large Intestine meridians, with little islands of other meridian involvement such as Small Intestine and Triple Burner.

Starting simply, the ears are primarily influenced by the Triple Burner meridian. The organ relationship of the Kidney with the ear means that the Kidney meridian may also be used to address ear problems.

The nose has an additional dominant meridian influence with the Large Intestine meridian and the Governing Vessel both distributed along the nose. Likewise, the organ relationship of the Lung with the nose implicates the internal branch of the Lung meridian, as it connects with the Large Intestine meridian for treatment of conditions of the nose.

The mouth is a bit more complex with multiple meridians passing through the area, both externally and internally. Externally, the Large Intestine meridian courses around the upper lip while the Stomach meridian travels along the lower lip. Internally, the Heart energetic extends into the tongue via the *luo*-connecting collateral of the Heart meridian; the Spleen energetic extends into the lower gums and tongue through an internal branch and divergent collateral of the Spleen meridian; and the Kidney energetic gives rise to the dynamic of bone development in the teeth.



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The eyes are more complex still, with many meridians reaching the eyes through a number of internal and external relationships. Clinically, the eye can be divided into regions that clarify treatment. Pain along the eyebrow was covered in the previous article; but, briefly, the inner eyebrow and bridge of the nose are influenced by the Bladder meridian, the mid eyebrow by the Gallbladder meridian, and the outer eyebrow by the Triple Burner meridian.

The lower aspect of the eye socket and the area down toward the cheek are primarily covered by the Stomach meridian, with the eyeball itself being treated via either the Liver or the Gallbladder meridian, the subtleties of which will be discussed in the Pathologies section, below.

Of the upper jaw, the maxilla is overwhelmingly represented by the Stomach meridian with only a tiny island of Small Intestine meridian involvement as one slides downward off the lateral maxilla in the region of *Quanliao* SI 18 and the temporomandibular joint which the Gallbladder meridian crosses as it makes its way to the ear.

The ear, too, has slight impressions of both the Small Intestine and Gallbladder meridians by way of *Tingong* SI 19 and *Tinghui* GB 2, respectively; however, the outer ear proper is a large volcano of Triple Burner meridian whereas the inner ear belongs to the deep ocean (underneath the volcano) of the Kidney meridian.

One curious feature of meridian distribution on the face which is open to interpretation is the exact flow of qi along the Large Intestine meridian. Most students will have learned that the Large Intestine meridian crosses the midline of the body at the philtrum and ascends to the opposite nostril to end at *Yingxiang* LI 20. However, there are diagrams of the Large Intestine meridian showing a convergence at *Renzhong* GV 26, but with each meridian flowing ipsilaterally to *Yingxiang* LI 20.

The fact that the Large Intestine meridian is the only primary meridian to cross the midline either makes it an outlier or marks a misinterpretation of its meridian flow. In clinical practice, I have found both ipsilateral and contralateral distal points to be effective in treating this last aspect of the Large Intestine meridian that ascends to the nose. This has led me to conclude that the merging of qi at the junction of *Renzhong* GV 26 is significant enough that qi along the Large Intestine meridian travels to either nostril with equal ease.

Distal Point Theory and Body Imaging

Before selecting distal points for treatment, it is important to review the theoretical framework for distal acupuncture. As discussed in the previous article on head pain, points that are opposite each other on the Chinese clock are powerful drivers of qi flow on the head and torso. This notion was popularized by the distal approach of Dr. Richard Tan but is derived from associations of the *I-Ching* with the circadian meridian flow systematized within the philosophy of the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches.¹

In this way, the Pericardium meridian is selected to treat Stomach meridian pathology, the Kidney meridian for obstruction along the Large Intestine meridian, and the Spleen meridian for an imbalance along the Triple Burner meridian. Each clock opposite meridian pair balances qi movement in a manner similar to the way the center point of an hourglass distributes sand contingent upon its tilt. Needling one meridian can have an electromagnetic pull, coursing qi along the opposing meridian and alleviating obstruction.

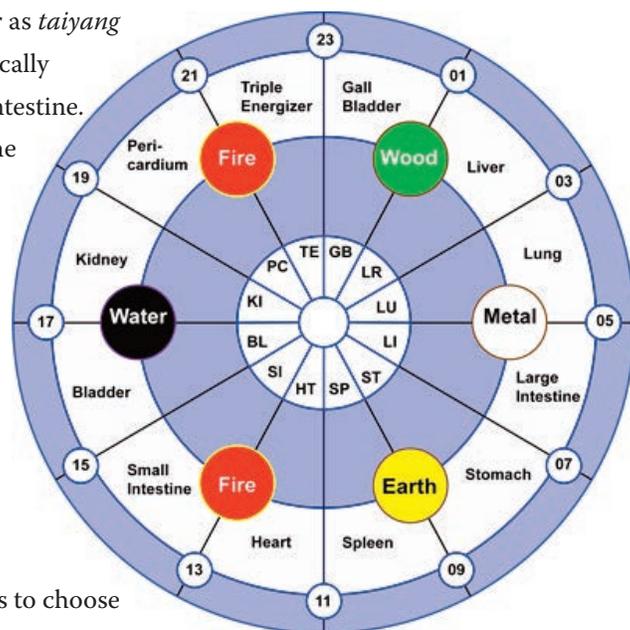
Although clock opposite meridians are powerful influencers of qi flow, the potency of the *yangming* meridians lends them to another system of treatment advanced by Dr. Richard Tan, that of using meridians of the same name. Here, the Gallbladder and Triple Burner meridians can treat each other via their name relationship of *shaoyang*. Likewise, the

Small Intestine and Bladder meridians will influence one another as *taiyang* pairs. In actuality, I have not found these relationships to be clinically relevant except for the *yangming* vessels of Stomach and Large Intestine. My speculation here is that the relative abundance of qi within the *yangming* meridians positions them well for a strong therapeutic effect between the two.

Finally, there is the straightforward traditional Chinese medicine concept of distal treatment along the affected meridian. This gives rise to classic axioms of treatment such as *Hegu* LI 4 for the face. It is categorized as the ruler point of the face for good reason, simultaneously being a distal point for its own meridian while an influencer of qi flow in the opposite Stomach meridian through its *yangming* relationship.

Keeping these meridian relationships in mind, the next step is to choose points along the meridian selected for treatment. Cole Magbanua's Bodymapping Acupuncture Technique posits that pathologies along the meridians of the head and torso are most effectively treated with points along the limbs that anatomically reference the head.²

In my experience, I have found the points on the hand and foot to be the most potent areas for treatment with the points in the knee and elbow joints playing an adjunctive role. Hand and foot points are strong movers of qi and reference large areas of the sensory and motor context as seen in diagrams of the cortical homunculus.



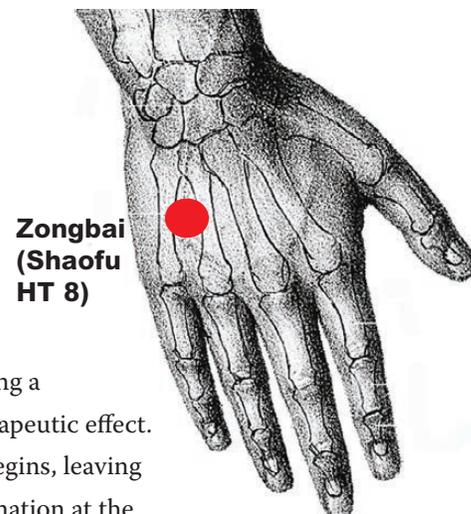
Selecting Distal Points for Treatment

After identifying the affected meridian, selecting points for treatment can be based on any of the systems mentioned above. However, clinical experience indicates that certain points work best to treat defined areas.

Eye Pain

Headache or migraine pain that is felt behind the eyes should be considered a Gallbladder meridian pathology and responds best to treatment via the clock opposite Heart meridian. As discussed in the previous article on head pain, select *Shaofu* HT 8 contralateral to the pain. Access *Shaofu* HT 8 via the back of the hand at extra point *Zongbai*, and stimulate the point until a fasciculation in the muscle occurs.

Any eye problem besides eye pain is best treated by the Liver meridian due to its dominant influence on vision. Here, needle ipsilateral *Taichong* LIV 3 and *Xingjian* LIV 2 until a deep ache is experienced at one or both points. Having a sensation start at or migrate to the bottom of the foot further amplifies the therapeutic effect. For sensitive patients, needle slowly and stop immediately after the sensation begins, leaving the option open to advance the needle further later in the treatment as the stagnation at the point dissipates.



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Empirically, *Guangming* GB 37 has long been known to be effective for visual problems by virtue of its being the *luo*-connecting point on the Gallbladder meridian, influencing the external-internal relationship between the Gallbladder and Liver meridians as well as the Gallbladder divergent meridian which ascends to the eye. This point is an excellent complement to the Liver points described above.

Nose Pain

Moving to the nose, the Large Intestine meridian has the most influence due to the presence of *Yingxiang* LI 20 at the lateral border of the ala nasi. There are several options for treatment depending on the problem. For pain in the nose, select the clock opposite foot point, contralateral *Rangu* KID 2. If this area is tender upon palpation, needle under the navicular tuberosity about one inch until the patient feels a deep ache.

Alternatively, utilize the microsystem of *Hegu* LI 4 as the master point of the face to distally clear stagnation along the same-sided Large Intestine meridian. When palpating the area, the most distal aspect of the second metacarpal bone at approximately *Sanjian* LI 3 is most effective for problems in the upper *jiao*, the traditional Chinese medicine textbook location of *Hegu* LI 4 for problems in the middle *jiao*, and the most proximal point, *Lingku*, for problems in the lower *jiao*. Thus, *Sanjian* LI 3 needled under the bone and toward *Houxi* SI 3 often elicits a deep ache, muscle fasciculation, or both, resulting in quick amelioration of nose pain.

If neither of these areas resolves nose pain, consider treatment to *Yuji* LU 10 given the relationship of the Lung to the nose as a sensory organ but also because *Yuji* LU 10 clears stagnation along the Bladder meridian as its clock opposite partner. Non-distinct nose pain can be a deep sinus issue that, due to their distribution, pulls in other meridians that may be affected. Clearing the Bladder meridian opens up the uppermost part of the nose with needling and, hopefully, muscle fasciculation at contralateral *Yuji* LU 10. Stimulating the point bilaterally is appropriate for nose pain that lacks a dominantly painful side.

A curious point for nose pain is *Lieque* LU 7. Although the Lung meridian can treat the Large Intestine by virtue of both belonging to the Metal element (yet another system of relationships practiced in distal acupuncture), I believe the point is valuable as the opening point of the *luo*-connecting collateral of the Lung meridian which connects to and addresses stagnation within the Large Intestine meridian. The Lung controls the nose, and as *Lieque* LU 7 also influences the Conception Vessel, which ascends into *Yinjiao* GV 28 and *Chengqi* ST 1, this point has multiple layers of treatment to justify its use.

Maxillary Sinus Pain

Sinus pain under the eyes reflects a pathology of the Stomach meridian and can be treated via the clock opposite relationship of Pericardium meridian, through the *yangming* meridian name relationship of Large Intestine, or via distal work on the Stomach meridian itself. I have found all three to be helpful, with deep sinus pain sometimes requiring treatment to multiple areas for complete resolution.

For clock opposite treatment, select contralateral *Laogong* PC 8 needled through the back of the hand in the same location as extra point *Yaotong* #1. To be most effective, stimulate the point until the patient experiences either a deep ache, muscle fasciculation that travels down the first or middle finger, or both.

Through the *yangming* relationship, *Sanjian* LI 3 can be accessed as well as *Hegu* LI 4, the two needles together having an effect greater than either alone. Here, the overlapping of areas becomes evident as *Sanjian* LI 3 treats both the Large Intestine meridian up to the nose as its own distal point but also by clearing the Stomach meridian on the opposite side. Again, this explains the utility of the area of *Hegu* LI 4 and its categorization as a master point for the face.

When treating the Stomach meridian as a distal point for itself, the most potent point is ipsilateral *Xiangu* ST 43 needed straight down toward *Yongquan* KID 1. This angle will elicit a stronger sensation correlating with a more pronounced therapeutic effect. If only partially effective, consider adding ipsilateral *Zusanli* ST 36 with the intent of getting a fasciculation in the tibialis anterior muscle and qi sensation to travel down the shin and toward the foot, often terminating right at *Xiangu* ST 43.

In the unlikely event that the distal points described above fail to completely alleviate sinus pain or pressure, check to see if pain lingers in the area of *Quanliao* SI 18. In this instance, needle contralateral *Taichong* LIV 3 until the patient feels a strong sensation, then reevaluate the patient's pain level. If only partially successful, add *Xingjian* LIV 2 to strengthen the therapeutic effect. These points clear stagnation within the Small Intestine meridian via the clock-opposite relationship.

Moving laterally from the maxilla bone to its articulation with the mandible at the ear, we find the temporomandibular joint. Pain in this specific area should be treated as stagnation within the Gallbladder meridian which crosses the joint space, but also because the Gallbladder meridian courses over the temporalis muscle which itself passes near the temporomandibular joint. Pain at this joint is reflective of tension originating from the temporalis muscle that leads to jaw pain and teeth grinding, often while asleep.

The *Hun* is active while we sleep, processing the thoughts and emotions that have dominated the previous day's events. Stress will seek resolution in our dreams in a manner that may result in fitful, restless sleep. Left unresolved, Liver and Gallbladder meridian flow is compromised, contributing to jaw tightness and tension headaches.

To remedy pain and tightness at the temporomandibular joint, first stimulate contralateral *Zongbai* until a muscle fasciculation is observed or felt by the patient. This will clear stagnation along the temporalis muscle similar to treatment of headaches along the side of the head. If pain persists, treat ipsilateral Gallbladder meridian points. Palpate the area around *Fengshi* GB 31 and needle the most tender spot. Next needle *Yanglingquan* GB 34 downward and angled slightly posterior toward the peroneus muscle until the patient feels a sensation travel down the side of the leg. Finally, palpate *Zulinqi* GB 41 and *Diwuhui* GB 42 and needle the point which is more tender. If they are of equal tenderness, use both.

Mouth and Jaw Pain

General pain or problems of the mouth, teeth, and jaw are best treated with *Sanjian* LI 3 and *Hegu* LI 4 given this area's strong resonance with both *yangming* meridians. For pain more specific to the mandible, treatment to contralateral *Laogong* PC 8 and ipsilateral *Xiangu* ST 43 will address the Stomach meridian more completely through the clock opposite relationship and as a distal point along the same meridian, respectively. For the maxilla, adding ipsilateral *Xiangu* ST 43 and *Neiting* ST 44 will have a potent clearing effect on the Stomach meridian as distal points along the same meridian and the *yangming* name relationship with the Large Intestine meridian.

It is important to note that maxillary sinus pain and upper jaw tooth pain can present similarly. Sometimes a patient will claim sinus problems when the root cause is a hidden dental infection. In contrast, referred pain to the upper teeth during a sinus infection is not indicative of a dental problem and quickly resolves when the sinuses are treated. Although acute dental pain responds exceedingly well to distal acupuncture, an unaddressed chronic dental infection in a tooth will only be temporarily alleviated by distal acupuncture. Inquiring about a recent history of upper respiratory infections and referring to a dentist will clarify the underlying cause of a recalcitrant case of upper jaw pain.

Ear

Ear pain should be considered a pathology within the Triple Burner meridian unless proven otherwise. Here, the clock opposite approach of treatment along the Spleen meridian is most effective. In order of importance, palpate and treat contralateral *Shangqiu* SP 5, *Yinlingquan* SP 9, and *Gongsun* SP 4; and check in with the patient to judge progress. Curiously, many ear issues stem from fluid imbalances within the inner ear, making the Spleen meridian an ideal site of treatment that simultaneously addresses an underlying *Zangfu* imbalance.

Further treatment to the ear can be achieved by needling ipsilateral *Yemen* TB 2 and *Zhongzhu* TB 3 as distal points along the affected meridian; these points share indications with traditional Chinese medicine for ear problems. A helpful technique is to position the patient's hand in a loose fist and thread a needle through *Yemen* TB 2 into *Zhongzhu* TB 3. Sometimes, this angle for treatment will elicit a muscle fasciculation in the hand that correlates with increased efficacy.

These Spleen and Triple Burner points should be utilized with ear sensory problems such as tinnitus and hearing loss, but may not be sufficient to fully correct the problem. Given the Kidney's relationship to the ear, brain, and nerves, bilateral *Taixi* KID 3 can be a helpful addition. That said, I have found these pathologies to be stubborn, often neurological in nature, and to require a multitude of modalities such as herbal formulas to address Kidney qi/yin/yang deficiency, as well as attention to a patient's diet if blood sugar dysregulation is underlying a diabetic neuropathy.

Conclusion

There is a lot of overlap among the points recommended for face pain, with the more potent points treating multiple areas of the face simultaneously. Given the confluence of meridians and the dominance of *yangming* within the face, seldom is there the need for additional modalities for uncomplicated facial pain.

One notable exception to this is pain and paralysis due to Bell's palsy in which moxibustion to the face is highly beneficial. Scalp acupuncture is both a microsystem and another system of suitable points away from the problem area that can be added for pain, numbness, and paralysis to further augment treatment. Points on the scalp are particularly effective for sensory and nerve issues such as tinnitus, dizziness, and visual disturbances.

Overall, facial pain is relatively easy to treat when selecting the points discussed, applying the proper technique, and eliciting a strong qi sensation in order to achieve quickly verifiable results. Remember to ask the patient to rate the pain both before and after stimulating distal acupuncture points to get instant feedback. Complete pain resolution marks the end of the treatment; but, if the relief is partial, consider additional stimulation to the selected points, or add points of different relationships to strengthen the therapeutic effect.

Conclusion

1. Twicken, David. *I Ching Acupuncture - The Balance Method: Clinical Applications of the Ba Gua and I Ching*. Singing Dragon. 2012.
2. Magbanua, Cole. *Bodysmapping Acupuncture Technique: In the Spirit of Master Tung*. Alcmag Inc. 2017.