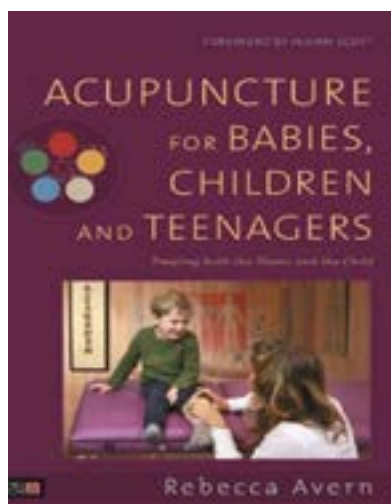




Rebecca Avern

Acupuncture for Babies, Children and Teenagers
Treating both the Illness and the Child
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Contents



<i>Foreword by Julian Scott</i>	11
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	12
<i>Notes for the Reader</i>	13
Introduction	15

PART 1: WHY DO CHILDREN BECOME ILL?

1. Introduction to the Causes of Disease	22
2. The Nature of Children	26
3. How Children Grow	31
4. Inherited, Pregnancy and Birth Factors	37
5. Emotions	46
6. The Role of the Family	55
7. The Challenges of Life	67
8. Miscellaneous Causes of Disease.	77
9. External Causes of Disease	96

PART 2: DIAGNOSIS OF CHILDREN

10. Introduction to the Diagnosis of Children.	102
11. Building Rapport with Children.	105
12. The Diagnostic Process	109
13. Diagnosing Babies and Infants.	123
14. Five Element Constitutional Acupuncture Applied to Children	130
15. Diagnosis Using Five Element Constitutional Acupuncture	138
16. The Fire Element	145
17. The Earth Element.	154
18. The Metal Element	163
19. The Water Element	171
20. The Wood Element	179

21. The Heart and Pericardium	189
22. The Spleen	199
23. The Lungs	208
24. The Kidneys	216
25. The Liver	224
26. The <i>Yang</i> Organs	236
27. Non-Organ Patterns	252

PART 3: TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

28. Introduction to the Treatment of Children	274
29. Treating the Whole Child	277
30. Treatment of the Child's Constitutional Imbalance	280
31. Child-Friendly Needling	291
32. Points Commonly Used to Treat Children	299
33. Alternatives to Needling	305
34. Paediatric <i>Tui Na</i>	317
35. <i>Shonishin</i>	343
36. Advice	350

PART 4: TREATMENT OF MENTAL-EMOTIONAL CONDITIONS

37. Introduction to the Treatment of Mental-Emotional Conditions	368
38. Hyperactivity, Inattentiveness and Learning Difficulties	370
39. Autistic Spectrum Disorders	379
40. Anxiety and Depression	399
41. Eating Disorders	419
42. Self-Harm	430
43. Sleep Problems	441

PART 5: TREATMENT OF PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

44. Introduction to the Treatment of Physical Conditions	456
45. Problems with Eating and Appetite	459
46. Stomach Ache and Abdominal Pain (Including Colic and Reflux)	471
47. Chronic Loose Bowels	485
48. Constipation and Stool Withholding	493
49. Nausea and Vomiting	506

INTRODUCTION

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There have always been challenges involved in being a child. The nature of these challenges largely depends on when and where a child is born. At times, just surviving childhood has been a feat that only the strongest and luckiest accomplish. Children born in the 21st century in the developed world are faced with unique challenges. Their survival is usually a given. Yet the ability to thrive, physically and psychologically, eludes many. These are the children who come to our clinics for acupuncture. This book is written for acupuncture practitioners who want to help them.

I have two main purposes in writing this book. The first is to encourage and enable more acupuncture practitioners to treat babies and young children. The second is to support and inspire those who are already doing so. I have attempted to align the approach to the treatment of children with the 21st century. My experience of treating children with acupuncture has all been gained in the developed world. It is my hope that any practitioner working in the developing world will find this book of some use too.

The key features that set this book apart from others in the English language on paediatric acupuncture are the following:

- Some of the causes of disease covered are recent phenomena or ones which have not previously been written about in the context of Chinese medicine, such as over-parenting, overstimulation and strain in the family.
- The book focuses on the conditions most seen in acupuncture clinics in the developed world in the 21st century. Most of these are chronic, such as digestive disturbances, headaches and eczema. Many are relatively new conditions that little or nothing has been written about in acupuncture literature, such as food allergies and intolerances. Some are conditions that are becoming more and more prevalent, such as early onset of puberty.
- The book also covers psychological, mental and emotional conditions, such as self-harm, anxiety, depression and eating disorders, about which little has been written for acupuncturists.
- I have highlighted the approaches to diagnosis and treatment that are needed when working with children of different ages, from zero to eighteen years. Little has been written before about the particular needs of teenagers and some of the conditions for which they seek treatment.
- There is an emphasis on using acupuncture to help children be free from symptoms, and also to help them thrive and become resilient adults.
- I also provide an overview of the key therapeutic techniques that can be used when treating children, such as *shonishin*, paediatric *tui na* and laser acupuncture. These have not previously been discussed in the same text.
- As well as differentiating diseases according to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) patterns, the book also includes application of the Five Element constitutional style of acupuncture to the treatment of children.

body he was completely safe, protected, warm, dark, quiet – now he is suddenly vulnerable, unprotected, every single element in his environment is new and strange. And anything new and strange is frightening.⁴

However, the delicacy of a baby or young child does not mean they should be wrapped in cotton wool. Some authors, for example Chen Wen Zhong in the 13th century,⁵ actually stressed that it is only through being exposed to the elements that children grow strongly. Parents have the difficult task of discerning to what extent they must protect their child and how much they should expose him to the world outside. The nature of the child, the factors he is exposed to and the relationship between the two determine what may be too much or not enough.

One area that supports Chen Wen Zhong's point of view is that of allergies. In 1989, Professor David Strachan developed 'the hygiene hypothesis'.⁶ He suggested that a lack of exposure to germs and infections during childhood was a possible cause of the rise in allergies. More recent research, which shows that children raised on farms have fewer allergies than those raised in cities, would appear to confirm this. Age-appropriate sensitive care and attention is vital; over- or under-exposure to the external environment may be detrimental.

Children are predominantly *yang*



Children are described as having a 'pure *yang*' constitution.⁷ It is worth exploring what this actually means.

Yang qi enables a child to grow and develop. Whilst *yin* creates stability, *yang* enables change. We see in children an absolutely extraordinary ability to grow and change. Within the first year of life, most children will have learned how to make sounds, sit up, crawl, walk, point at things, hold things, chew... They have usually tripled their birth weight. Children have a form or a quality of *yang* that adults simply do not possess.

Young children are the very essence of *yang*. They have a great need to run around and be active in order for all their *yang qi* not to become stagnant. Most parents of a young child know that there will come a point in the day when they have to send their child outside to let off steam. The abundant enthusiasm and inquisitiveness that are characteristic of most young children is also an expression of their exuberant *yang*.

Despite the *yang* constitution of young children, they often suffer from conditions which are Cold and/or deficient in nature. This is because there are so many aspects of modern life, such as diet and some medications, which have a strongly cooling effect on the child's *qi*.

Twenty-first-century children often present with a complex picture. As well as being constitutionally '*yang*', many are also deficient and plagued by Cold and Damp. This may, in part, be due to the following factors:

- » Twenty-first-century diets, often composed largely of energetically Cold- and Damp-forming foods.
- » Children commonly being born to older mothers, who are themselves depleted.
- » Widespread use of energetically Cold medicines, such as anaesthetics during childbirth, antibiotics and fever-suppressing medications.
- » The nature of life (especially for city-dwellers) which is often over-scheduled and strongly depleting.
- » Many children's activities are 'head-based', which constrains *yang qi* rather than allowing it to flow and expand.

- A child may be prone to outbursts of anger, which makes the parent feel uncomfortable and so the child gets punished for it.
- A child may be prone to anxiety and worry, which touches into the parent's own suppressed feelings of anxiety. So the parent responds with statements such as 'Don't be silly, there is nothing to worry about'. The child is left feeling he is wrong to have the emotion or is somehow inadequate for feeling it.

Over-parenting



Over the past few decades, parents have become ever more heavily involved in all aspects of their children's lives. Whilst there is no perfect way to parent, and every approach has its potential pitfalls, a heavily involved style of parenting may in some cases contribute to both physical and psychological ill health in children.

Many children today live as if they are under a permanent microscope. There are many possible reasons for this. For example:

- Most families have fewer children than in the past. There are fewer children on whom parents may place their hopes and dreams.
- For some couples, their quest to conceive has been fraught with difficulty and a cherished child comes after years of frustration and disappointment.
- The world outside is perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be a far more dangerous place than it once was.
- There is increased competition for school places.
- In many parts of the world, unemployment rates have increased, meaning there is more parental anxiety about whether their children will find work as adults.

All of these factors have shaped the way that many people parent today, leading to concepts such as the 'tiger mum' and 'helicopter parent'. There are various aspects of this parenting style, all of which may place a physical or psychological burden on a child. These are:

- over-attentiveness
- pressures and expectations
- excessive criticism
- spoiling and over-indulging.

Over-attentiveness



It is very difficult as a parent to achieve an appropriate level of care for a child. There are probably few children who do not feel either neglected in some way or excessively fussed over at times. Some children, however, have their lives micro-managed for them. Decisions about every aspect of their lives are made by their parents. Minor scrapes and sniffles are given much more attention than they warrant. With mobile phones, there is the potential for anxious parents to be in constant contact with their children and to know what they are doing and where they are at all times. Parents often consider it too dangerous for children to go out to play on their own, either because of 'stranger danger' or traffic. So children are accompanied by adults until a much older age than they would have been a few decades ago. In an effort to ensure their child eats a good diet, everything that a child puts into his mouth is controlled by the parents.

DIAGNOSIS USING FIVE ELEMENT CONSTITUTIONAL ACUPUNCTURE

.....

The topics discussed in this chapter are:

- Diagnosing the level of the imbalance
- Diagnosis is based primarily on signs rather than symptoms
- The importance of the emotional imbalance
- How to diagnose the emotional imbalance
- Colour, sound and odour
- The pulse

Diagnosing the level of the imbalance

Some problems have clearly arisen in the body. If a child comes to the clinic with a sprained wrist which occurred when she fell out of a tree, treatment clearly needs to be focused on the body. Another child may come because he has stopped seeing his friends and will not get out of bed in the morning. In this case, the problem is most likely to lie in his spirit, his *shen*.

The above examples are very clear cut and the reality is not always this simple. In many cases, the problem lies in the body and the *shen*. The job of the practitioner is to decide where the *primary* imbalance is and direct the treatment accordingly. Some problems have a clear physical origin, yet the fact that they do not heal as they are expected to is because of an underlying imbalance in the *shen*. A child may respond to a physical problem in a way which indicates that his *shen* is not healthy. In both these cases, purely treating the body is unlikely to resolve the problem. *Su Wen* Chapter 25 explains, 'In order to make all acupuncture thorough and effective one must first cure the spirit.'¹⁸

Some 'clues' that may point towards the child's problem being predominantly at the level of the *shen* are:

- **Interaction with others:** The child struggles to interact well with people. The practitioner will either observe this in relation to herself or the way the child interacts with his parent. Or the parent may report that the child struggles to make friends or get along with other family members.
- **Eyes:** The child struggles to make eye contact, or the eyes reveal an inner state of lifelessness or agitation.
- **Body language:** The child's body reveals an imbalance in the spirit. She may carry herself as if she has 'given up'. Her body is slumped and she drags herself around. She may, conversely, reveal an agitation of her spirit in her body. She may find it hard to be still or her body may be extremely tense and tight.
- **Speech:** She may not be able to express herself in an age-appropriate way or the language she uses may reveal an unhappy spirit.

- hyperactivity
- talkative with loud voice
- tendency to high fevers
- constipation with dry and possibly foul-smelling stools
- tendency to red, painful mouth and tongue ulcers
- red face

Teenagers



Any of the previous symptoms, plus:

- panic attacks
- manic behaviour
- tendency to red acne
- heavy periods in girls

Pulse: overflowing Heart pulse, rapid

Tongue: red tip, yellow coating

Treatment principles: clear Heat; calm the *shen*; tonify underlying deficiencies (which may be in any Organ, especially those related to the constitutional imbalance)

One six-year-old boy with Heart-Fire Blazing manifested this pathology in a very endearing way. He was incredibly open and affectionate, was talkative and had a wonderful laugh. He just seemed to ooze joy and happiness. He was the life and soul of the family and the classroom. Whilst these are obviously not, on their own, traits that one would necessarily want to change, in this case they were a reflection of an imbalance. The boy also only slept for a few hours each night and his family felt his behaviour was bordering on mania much of the time.

Variation: Phlegm-Fire harassing the Heart

Heart-Fire Blazing often leads to Phlegm-Fire harassing the Heart. The Fire condenses fluids, which leads to the creation of Phlegm. When this is the case, as well as the symptoms above, there may also be the following:

- the child being hard to reach and in her own world
- phases of extreme lethargy, alternating with periods of hyperactivity
- impaired speech.

Key aetiological factors

- inherited tendency
- womb Heat
- chronic and/or intense emotional difficulties (such as instability within the family or difficulties at school)
- chronic and/or intense anger and frustration (causing Liver Fire which transmits to the Heart)



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