

How Do You Treat *Blepharospasm* in Your Practice?

BENIGN ESSENTIAL BLEPHAROSPASM, otherwise known as an eye twitch or tic, can be a difficult and annoying problem. Common measures—such as reducing eyestrain with tinted glasses and artificial tears or medicating a patient with antidepressants and anxiolytics—often prove to be disappointing. *Botulinum* toxin has become the treatment of choice, but even that has to be repeated every few months. In recalcitrant cases, surgical intervention has been used.¹ If patients are fortunate enough to be free of compounding psychologic factors initially, the symptom itself will certainly generate psychosocial distress. Given such difficulties, acupuncture is certainly worth a try.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) tics and muscular spasms are classified as Wind, which, in turn, is related

to the Liver. The eyes, too, are as a whole related to the Liver.² The eyelid movements of blepharospasm clearly suggest Wind, while the irritation suggests an Excess of energy and/or Heat in the head (though Liver Wind can theoretically arise from Excess or Deficiency, many cases of blepharospasm arise from an Excess). If indeed there is an Excess, then the conventional approach of paralyzing the local musculature with *Botulinum* toxin may not be so wise, because it leaves the Excess energy unaddressed. An acupuncture approach aimed at dissipating the Excess might be better.

One simple approach involves using three or four local points to relax the eye (Fig. 1), accompanied by a few pertinent peripheral points to pacify the Liver, calm Wind and pull Heat downward (Table 1). Because of the probable

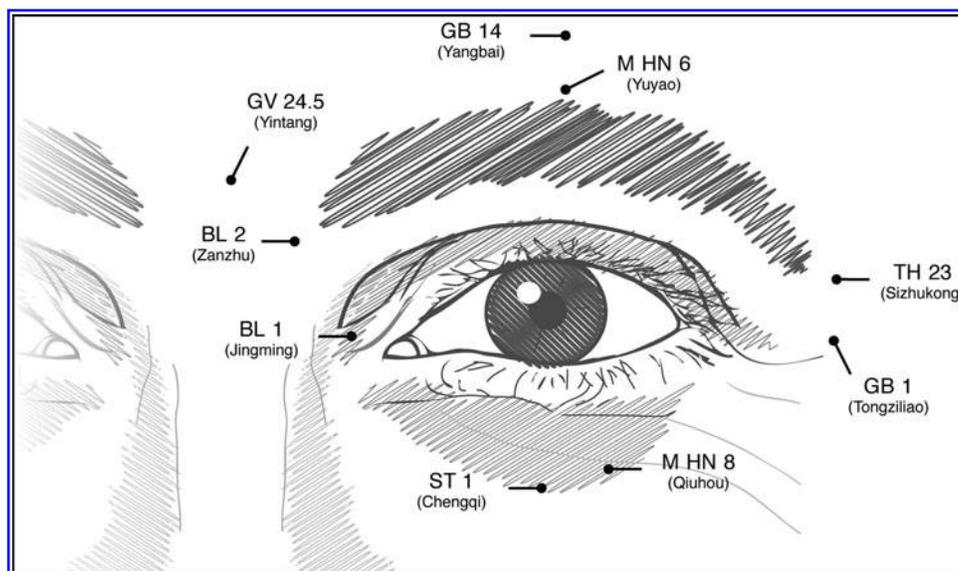


FIG. 1. Local points around the eye.

Medical Acupuncture is pleased to continue this regular feature, **Clinical Pearls**, which we have found to be very useful for, and practical to, the readership, and very popular. All of us are confronted with clinical challenges, especially when dealing with therapeutic strategies. We hope this ongoing collection of Clinical Pearls will be easily accessible and ready to put into action for the benefit of our patients, and even ourselves. How often do we ask our colleagues: “How do you treat...?” This time, we posed the question: “How do you treat blepharospasm in your practice?” Herein lie your contributions. We trust that our readership will continue to participate in this section by either asking the questions or supplying the “Pearls.” If you have a “question” you would like to see answered, please send it to our managing editor, Yael Benporat, at: yaelbenporat@me.com We encourage and welcome your input and participation. Please address your answers to “Pearls” to our managing editor, Yael Benporat, at: yaelbenporat@me.com

TABLE 1. LOCAL AND DISTAL POINTS FOR TREATING BLEPHAROSPASM

<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Local points</i>	<i>Distal points</i>
Mainly Wind	GB 1 (<i>Tongziliao</i>) GV 24.5 (<i>Yintang</i>) GB 14 (<i>Binao</i>) SI 18 (<i>Quanliao</i>) TH 22 (<i>Erheliao</i>) M-HN 6 (<i>Yuyao</i>)	<i>Four Gates</i> : LR 3 (<i>Taichong</i>), LI 4 (<i>Hegu</i>) & LI-14 (<i>Yangbai</i>)
Wind & Heat	ST 1 (<i>Chengqi</i>) or ST 2 (<i>Sibai</i>) BL 1 (<i>Jingming</i>) or BL 2 (<i>Zhanzhu</i>) TH 23 (<i>Sizhukong</i>) M-HN-8 (<i>Qiuhou</i>)	BL 60 (<i>Kunlun</i>), BL 64 (<i>Jinggu</i>) LR 2 (<i>Xiangjian</i>) & GB 37 (<i>Guangming</i>)

Excess energy above the neck, other points to consider would include Window-to-the-Sky points (e.g., GV 16 [*Fengfu*], TE 16 [*Tianyou*], and LI 18 [*Futu*]) and Barrier points (BL 10 [*Tianzhu*], GB 21 [*Tianjing*], ST 11 [*Qishe*]) to connect the head and body. If there is an underlying Blood or Yin Deficiency then one or two points for those conditions can be added (e.g., for Blood deficiency, SP 6 [*Sanyinjiao*], ST 36 [*Tsusanli*], LR 8 [*Ququan*], CV 4 [*Guanyuan*], BL 17 [*Geshu*], BL 18 [*Ganshu*], and BL 20 [*Pishu*]; and, for Yin Deficiency, KI 3 [*Taixi*], KI 6 [*Zhaohai*], and BL 23 [*Shenshu*]; see Table 2).³

Care should be taken when needling around the orbit of the eye, especially if the eyelids are moving. Needles should be inserted slowly 0.5–1.0 *cun* in depth and not manipulated. Given that there are many blood vessels in this area of the head, patients should be warned that there may be bruising, although, if it occurs, it will rarely cause any problems. In some patients, orbit points may have to be avoided altogether. In that case, BL 2 can be substituted for BL 1, and ST 2 can be substituted for ST 1 or *Qiuhou*. Alternatively, the points can be stimulated with acupressure

Ear acupuncture points can be added and the patient can be sent home with a press-tack or two in place to anchor the acupuncture experience. Points to consider when screening for active points include Point Zero, *Shen Men*, Sympathetic, Stress Control, Master Cerebral, Master Sensorial (eye), Face, and Liver.⁴

Herbs can also be useful adjuncts. For example, Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin can be used to calm Liver Wind and Heat. It is a patent formula but variations are available

from Health Concerns (Gastrodia Relieve Wind Formula: www.healthconcerns.com) and Kan Herbs (Steady Centeredness).

A course of 12 acupuncture treatments, once or twice weekly, would seem reasonable to gauge success. Patients are more likely to get results if they take responsibility, reduce excessive eyestrain, deal with any pressing psychosocial issues, get plenty of rest, and engage in a regular meditative discipline.

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Graphics were designed by Dr. Greenwood’s son, Richard Greenwood, BFA, MA (website: www.richardgreenwood.ca).

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No competing financial conflicts exist.

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BENIGN ESSENTIAL BLEPHAROSPASM refers to involuntary excessive blinking and eye closure caused by spasms of the muscles around the eye. If there is added oromandibular dystonia, the condition is known as is Meige’s disease. Both conditions are of unknown etiology. Blepharospasm is also associated with use of benzodiazepines,

TABLE 2. OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

<i>Window-to-the-Sky</i>	<i>Barrier points</i>	<i>↓ Blood</i>	<i>↓ Yin</i>
LI 18, TH 16 & GV 16	BL 10, GB 21 & ST 11	SP 6, ST 36, LR 8, CV 4 BL 17, BL 18 & BL 20	KI 3, SP 6, KI 6, BL 23 & CV 4

estrogen replacement agents, anti-Parkinsonism drugs, multiple sclerosis, and disorders of the basal ganglia.

Modern Western medicine treatment involves using botulinum toxin injections and this treatment is quite effective.¹

The efficacy of acupuncture in blepharospasm has been shown in studies.^{2,3} The points usually used are LI 4 and GB 20 (both reduced); GV 20, TE 23, UB 1, SI 18, *TaiYang* and *AhShi* points (by the even method). These are points used to produce symptomatic relief and are unlikely to eradicate the disorder.

In Chinese medicine, all abnormal involuntary movements are caused by Wind. Wind can also cause the opposite condition—paralysis. External Wind produces temporary pathology. Internal wind often causes prolonged symptoms and is related to Liver Disharmony.

Various presentations indicate causes as follows:

- Short-duration blepharospasm is caused by External Wind.
- Blepharospasm, with vertigo and wiry pulse, is caused by Liver Yang rising producing Wind.
- Blepharospasm, with vertigo and slippery pulse, is caused by Liver Yang rising with Phlegm.
- Blepharospasm, with dizziness, blurred vision, and choppy pulse, is caused by Liver Blood Deficiency.
- Blepharospasm, with depression and wiry pulse, is caused by Liver Qi Stagnation.

Acupuncture Treatments

Liver Yang Rising. Treatments include:

- Reduce LR 3, LI 4, GB 20, and TE 5 to subdue Yang.
- Reduce GV 19 to subdue Wind. If there is associated Phlegm, reduce ST 40.
- Chinese herbal formula: Zhen Gan Xi Feng Tang.

Liver Blood Deficiency. Treatments include:

- Reduce the same points as above.
- Reinforce SP 6, LR 8, KI 3 to nourish Liver Blood.
- Reinforce CV 4 and BL 17 to nourish Blood in general.
- Chinese herbal formula: E Jiao Ji Zi Huang Tang.

Liver Qi Stagnation. Treatments include:

- Reduce GB 34, LR 3, LR 13, LR 14, TE 6 & PE 6.
- Chinese herbal formula: Yue Ju Wan.

Look for associated Liver and Kidney Yin Deficiency.

Liver Yin Deficiency. Symptoms are dry eyes, tongue without coating, tiredness. Treatments include:

- Reinforce LR 8, ST 36, SP 6 & KI 3.
- Chinese herbal formula: Yi Guan Jan.

Kidney Yin Deficiency. Symptoms are backache, night sweating, and tiredness. Treatments include:

- Reinforce KI 3, KI 10, KI 19, SP 6, CV 4, and (LU 7 and KI 6) in that order to open the Conception Vessel, which nourishes Kidney Yin.
- Chinese herbal formula: Zuo Gui Wan.

The auricular points to use are: Face, Point Zero, *Shen Men*, Thalamus, Master Cerebral, and Liver.

Codeine overdose produces blepharospasm. This fact is taken advantage of by homoeopaths to use Codeine 30C to treat the condition successfully, by using the principle of Like Cures Like. Acupuncture and homeopathy work through using bioenergy and can be combined advantageously.

Chinese medicines should only be used under the supervision of a qualified Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner.

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