

LIFE HEALTH

Boost memory with acupuncture, ginseng



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours
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Your brain won't be able to answer all those questions if you don't treat it with care. (FOTOLIA)

Memory, concentration, and focus. These are things that most of us would like to achieve. But with much of our information — from friend's digits to calendar events — stored in our phones, there is a tendency to forget to remember. In addition, flipping from story to story on social media and practicing multitasking leads us toward a poorer ability to stay focused on one item.

Of course, there are things you can do to boost your brain power. Taking time to practice a relaxation response with slow, deep, controlled breaths calms the nervous system, allowing the frontal part of your brain — used for decision-making, organizing, and

problem solving — to activate. A 2005 study published in the journal Neuroreport found that those who meditate regularly have more brain tissue, and lose fewer of their brain cells as they age.

One of the seemingly contradictory benefits of acupuncture is an increase in the relaxation response. Acupuncture has also been shown to increase alpha brain wave activation. This is a pattern that leads one to feel calm and relaxed, even when alert. Alpha brain wave stimulation helps manage the ability to cope with pain, reduces feelings of stress and anxiety, and improves memory. As published in BMC Neuroscience, subjects accurately recalled more words — 15% better than control subjects — when alpha stimulated during a memory test. Acupuncture may also help with mild cognitive impairment and Alzheimer’s. When an fMRI (real-time imaging of brain activity) is done during acupuncture treatment, areas of the brain that were impaired — and related to problems in cognitive function, like memory, reason, and language — became more active.

Ginseng, one of traditional Chinese medicine’s most revered herbs, is sometimes prescribed to help improve memory, concentration, and focus. It has been shown to improve memory in otherwise healthy individuals aged 38 to 66 when combined with another herb, ginkgo biloba. But be sure to find out if these herbs are right for you, as taken inappropriately they may cause side effects.

Choosing the right foods to feed your hard-working brain is also key. Some brain-enhancing foods include fatty fish, pomegranate, avocados, blueberries, sage, and nuts and seeds.

Can you remember all that? If not, then perhaps it’s time to make some healthy changes for your brain.

Dr. Melissa Carr is a registered doctor of traditional Chinese medicine.

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