

Auricular Acupuncture and Chinese Dietary Therapy in the Treatment of Patients with Chronic Headache

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Abstract

Introduction: Headaches are common symptoms and are caused by various factors [1-7]. They can be divided into functional and organic headaches. The treatment in Western Medicine consists in the use of anti-inflammatory medications, according to the type of headache diagnosed. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, auricular acupuncture (AA) associated with Chinese dietary therapy (CDT) can be extremely useful for patients with chronic headaches and migraines, especially those that did not find comfort or success in their current treatment.

Purpose: This article aims to analyze the effects of AA associated with CDT in patients with chronic headache or migraine.

Methods: Research of over 1500 patient records who had undergone AA and CDT, in the Medical Acupuncture and Pain Management Clinic, in the city of Franca, São Paulo, Brazil. From these, 160 (10.66%) had headache symptoms. A questionnaire was filled by phone by 69 (43,12%) of these patients.

Results: A considerable number of patients, 65 (94.20%) who had undergone AA and CDT for the treatment of headache symptoms had improved. From this group 44 (63.78%) felt improvement in 4 or less sessions, whereas 21 (30.43%), felt improvement only after more than 4 sessions. Sixty-five (94.20%) of the patients evaluated the effectiveness of AA and CDT for their headaches as being excellent or good. Ten (14.49%) had a history of hospitalization for headaches, with 36 (52.17%) declaring previous neurological treatment. From the results it is possible to see that 55 (79.71%) of the patients considered that they had been completely cured or had significant improvement.

Conclusion: With 65 (94.20%) of approval, it can be concluded AA and CDT were useful in the treatment of headaches of the patients analyzed.

Keywords: Auricular Acupuncture, Chinese Dietary Nutrition, Energy, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Headache.

INTRODUCTION

According to Western Medicine, headaches are common symptoms and are caused by various factors. They can be divided into functional and organic headaches. [1-7]

The cause for functional headaches, such as headaches due to neurasthenia and headaches during menstrual periods, is not well understood. Organic headaches are usually caused by stimulation from inflammation, traction or compression of sensitive brain tissue, such

as meningitis, blood vessels in the brains and cranial nerves. Nasopharyngeal carcinoma, nasosinusitis, glaucoma, and ametropia are some of the symptoms of illness in the five senses. [1-7]

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) believes the headaches are due to external factors, such as Wind, Cold, Dampness and Heat, as well as internal energy imbalances, such as hyperactivity of Liver *Yang*, flaming up of Liver fire, deficiency of *Qi* and Blood, deficiency of the Kidneys, retention of phlegm, dampness or Blood stasis due to trauma. [8]

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In TCM, it is possible to determine to which channel the illness pertains according to the place where the headaches are localized. [9] Headaches in the forehead and supra-orbital bone are due to disorders in the Stomach Channel of Foot *Yang Ming*. [9] Headaches on both sides of the head, especially in the temples, are due to the disorder of the Gall-bladder Channel of Foot *ShaoYang*. [9] Pain in the back of the head and neck, is due to the disorder of the Bladder Channel of Foot *Tai Yang*. [9] Headaches in the vertex of the head are due to the trouble of the Liver Channel of Foot *Jue Yin*. [8-9]

Chinese Dietary Therapy is a medical specialty within TCM and it treats diseases only using diet, according to the energy imbalance of the patient, as well as the energy present on the food. Besides using these two tools, the author also benefit from a case report of a patient with leg pain and glaucoma, treated in 2007, who had become the cornerstone for her perspective of thought in diagnosis and treatments of all kinds of disease. [10-11]

This idea started during the treatment of one specific patient 13 years ago. This patient was a 70-year-old male, who reported pain in the legs and was diagnosed with Kidney-*Yang* deficiency, according to TCM. He received treatment with Chinese dietary counselling, acupuncture and auricular acupuncture associated with apex ear bloodletting. [12-16]

With the treatment done, the pain in the legs diminished and the patient was submitted to an interview 30 days after. In this interview, the patient revealed that his eye pressure had also lowered with the treatment done, as his ophthalmologist confirmed. He had not previously reported to be treating glaucoma in the last 40 years with little improvement of his intraocular pressure. With the treatment performed, his pressure lowered from 40mmHg to 17mmHg. [12-16]

This interesting case became the cornerstone of the author studies, *trying* to comprehend how the treatment based on the root of the problem (the

energy imbalances) could treat different diseases and symptoms simultaneously and using the same methods, even if the doctor is not aware of the patients' problem. [12-16]

PURPOSE

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate that auricular acupuncture and Chinese Dietary Therapy are useful in reducing or abolishing the crises of headache or migraines, creating greater spacing between pain crises, reducing its intensity or even eliminating them.

It was also a goal to perform an individualized treatment, focused in the specific energy imbalances of each patient, focusing in the root-level, balancing *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi* and Blood energies and not only the symptoms.

METHODS

Research of over 1500 patient records who had undergone auricular acupuncture and Chinese dietary therapy at the Medical Acupuncture and Pain Management Clinic, in the city of Franca, São Paulo, Brazil. From these, 160 (10.66%) had headache symptoms. Then from these, 78 (48.75%) were contacted by phone and 9 (5.62%) were discarded because they claimed not having previous headaches. A questionnaire was filled by phone by these 69 who had been previously treated.

All patients treated were submitted to auricular acupuncture always associated with Chinese dietary therapy, focusing in the energy imbalances of each patient. The diet itself may be triggering the energy imbalances of the patient, and the auricular acupuncture alone cannot be able to treat the patient completely if the diet is wrong, in the energy point of view.

All patients had headache symptoms as a primary or secondary reason for treatment. The main questions presented to the subjects are better described in Table 1.

Table 1. Questionnaire for Headaches Evaluation

Questionnaire
1. Did you have headaches?
2. Was it your main symptom?
3. How many acupuncture sessions did you have?
4. After how many sessions did you notice an improvement?
5. How would you evaluate it as a solution for your headaches?
6. Hospitalization?
7. Previous treatments?
8. Would you recommend acupuncture treatment for headaches?
9. Did you feel you were completely cured?

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In Figure 1, it is possible to observe the AA points used. The number 12, 13 and 14, treat symptoms of headache. The points 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 are used for treatment of possible energy imbalances that the patient may have, according to individualized evaluation. Points 1 and 3, are used for the treatment of anxiety, usually associated with headache symptoms. The point 2 is responsible for sleep, and is used for the patient have better sleep and recover his energy better, especially in the Kidney meridian.

The point 15 is an important tool for treating pathologies associated with pain, in this case, headaches, in which 3-5 drops of Blood are taken, to take off Heat retention that normally makes part of the energy imbalances linked to headache symptoms.

This method was already described in several articles of the author, such as *Is it Possible to Treat Community-Acquired and Nosocomial Infections with the Same Method, Without the Use of Antibiotics?*, published by the Journal of Applied Microbiological Research of Innovation Info, in July 2019.

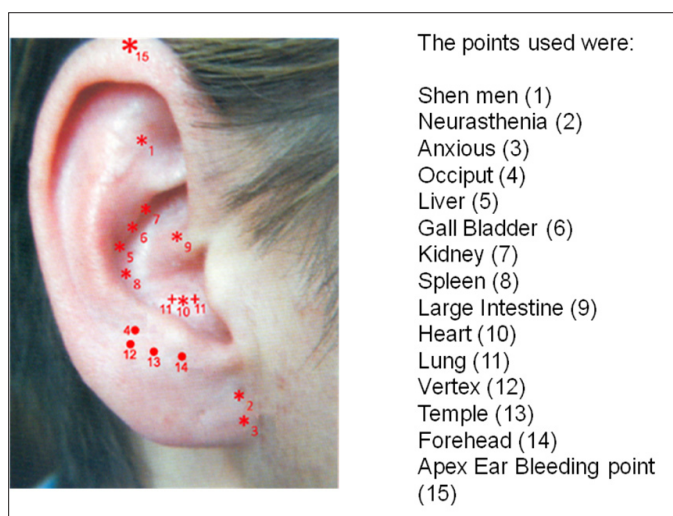


Fig 1. Ear Acupuncture Points Used

RESULTS

The 69 patients (100%) selected remembered that they had had headaches. Of these 68 (98.55%)

considered them as a primary symptom. The Table 2 shows the amount of sessions the patients had and the improvement results.

Table 2. Amount of AA Sessions and Results

Amount of AA Sessions and Results
5 (7.25%) patients showed improvement after 1 auricular acupuncture session.
19 (27.54%) patients showed improvement after 2 auricular acupuncture sessions.
16 (23.19%) patients showed improvement after 3 auricular acupuncture sessions.
4 (5.80%) patients showed improvement after 4 auricular acupuncture sessions.
21 (30.43%) patients showed improvement after more than 4 auricular acupuncture sessions.
4 (5.80%) patients felt no improvement.

Analyzing the table, 63.78% (44 patients) showed improvement in the first month of treatment. Table

3 demonstrates the evaluation of the patients of the treatment done.

Table 3. Patients Evaluation of the Treatment

Patients Evaluation of the Treatment	Number of Patients	Percentage
1.Excellent / good:	65	94.20%
2.Regular:	3	4.35%
3.Unsatisfactory:	1	1.45%

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Analyzing the patients, 10 (14.49%) of them had had previous hospitalization due to headache and 59 (85.51%) patients had not had any previous hospitalization due to headache. Concerning the previous neurological treatment, 36 patients (52.17%) had performed previous neurological treatment, and the others did not.

Regarding the satisfaction with the treatment, 65 or 94.20% of the patients would recommend the treatment done, while 4 patients or 5.80% would not. Regarding feeling cured of their headaches, 14 patients or (20.29%) of the patients considered to be completely cured, while 14 (20.29%) considered themselves not cured, and 41 (59.42%) stated to have significant improvement in their symptoms. This last evaluation, in Traditional Chinese Medicine, concerns several factors, involving if the patients follows the diet correctly or not, the exposure to external factors, the exposure to emotional factors, etc. These variables will influence the results of the treatment.

DISCUSSION

Western Medicine Definition of Headache and Treatment

Organic headaches are usually caused by stimulation from inflammation, traction or compression of sensitive brain tissue, such as meningitis, blood vessels in the brains and cranial nerves. [1-7]

Migraine is linked to depression, anxiety, affective disorders, stroke, and epilepsy, among other conditions. These disorders can pose therapeutic challenges and limit treatment options. [1-7]

The treatment varies depending on the diagnosis of the headache. To perform this diagnosis usually doctors will use the duration and placement of the headaches, the frequency, episodic or chronic. Other factors also have to be taken into consideration such as emotional distress or medication overuse. [1-2]

The majority of the treatments are done with medications in high-concentrations, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. In the case of migraines, it is also common the use of aspirins, domperidone, anti-emetics, NSAIDs (naproxen and diclofenac). [1]

Traditional Chinese Medicine Main Principles

The Tree Metaphor

In Figure 4, it is possible to see that the tree as an allegory of the human body, the part of the tree that is below the earth, which is invisible to the naked eye, are its roots, that the author understands as representations of the energy part, that is also not visible and represent the Theory of the Five Elements and *Yin* and *Yang*. [12-16]

Traditional Chinese Medicine sees the individual as a whole, including the environment, represented by the external or climatic factors (Cold, Wind, Heat, Dryness and Humidity) and internal factors, such as the emotions and the diet. [12-16]

In the same way a tree needs to have stronger roots to grow, the body has to be in balance to be healthy. Also, in the same way the environment will influence the health of the tree, the environment will influence the health of the body. [12-16]

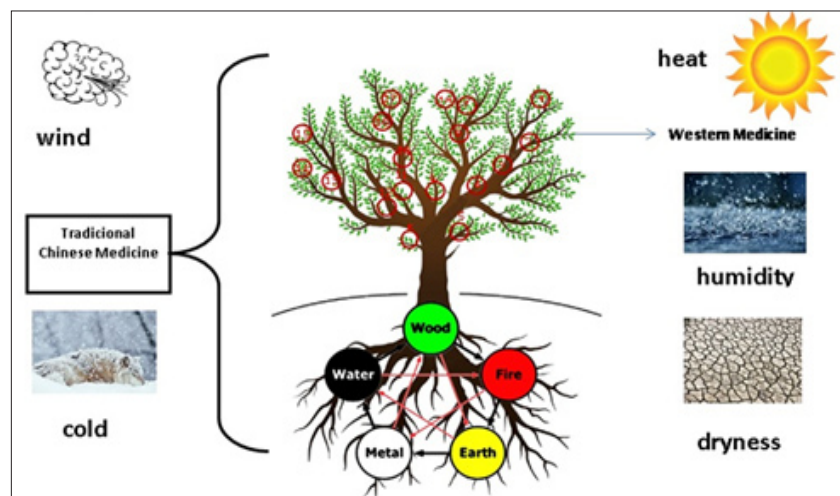


Fig 4. The tree metaphor

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The treatment for the headaches in Western Medicine is done in the leaf-level, considering only the symptom, in the branch of Neurology. In this study and in TCM, the treatment is focused not only on the leaves, but also on the roots, treating deeper, in the energy-level.

Yin, Yang, Qi and Blood

Firstly, Traditional Chinese Medicine main cornerstone are the concepts of *Yin* and *Yang*. The *Yin* and *Yang*

symbol originated from Oriental cultures and it represents the main source of opposites behaving in a cycle. According to TCM, everything existing in the world is ruled by the main principles of *Yin* and *Yang*. These two energy forces would be present in everything including our body, and more specifically our organs, as represented in Figure 5. [17-18]

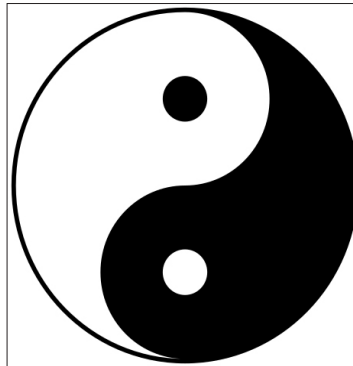


Fig 5. *Yin and Yang*

There is a symmetrical relationship between them, as they are completely opposite and complementary: *Yin* represents darkness, earth, and cold, the passive and female energy. *Yang* represents light, heaven, active energy and male energy. [17-18]

The cycle suggests continuous movement, and these can be clearly understood in the Figure 5. *Yang* cyclically returns to its beginning; the *Yin* reaches its apogee and yields its place to the *Yang*. [17-18]

In order to achieve health, the main principle is the balance of the *Yin* and *Yang* energy present inside our bodies. For the energy to circulate properly other energies have to work in harmony with it, *Qi* and Blood, as shown in Figure 6, for the individual to be in balance, these four forces have to be balanced. When one or more of these energies are not properly balanced, symptoms may appear, as well as Heat retention. The symptoms may be physical or emotional, such as infections, diabetes, depression, anxiety, headaches, etc. [17-18]

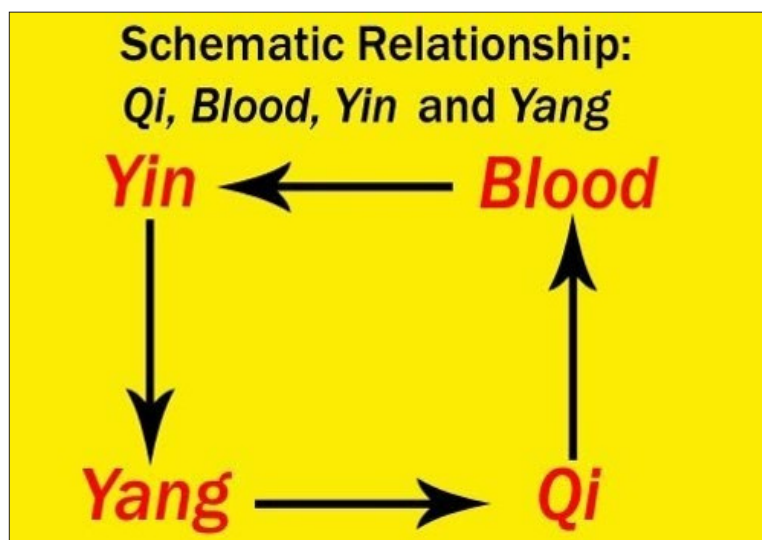


Fig 6. *Schematic Relationship: Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang*

Five Elements Theory

The other cornerstone of TCM is the Five Elements theory. According to this theory, there is a relationship between Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and Wood. This energy relationship is present inside our bodies and is associated with specific organs, entitled the massive organs. They are considered more important because

they are responsible for other organs and rule the rest of the body. [17-18]

The Wood element corresponds to the Liver, The Fire element corresponds to the Heart. The Earth element corresponds to the Spleen, The Metal element corresponds to the Lungs, and the Water element corresponds to the Kidney, as represented in Figure 7. [17-18]

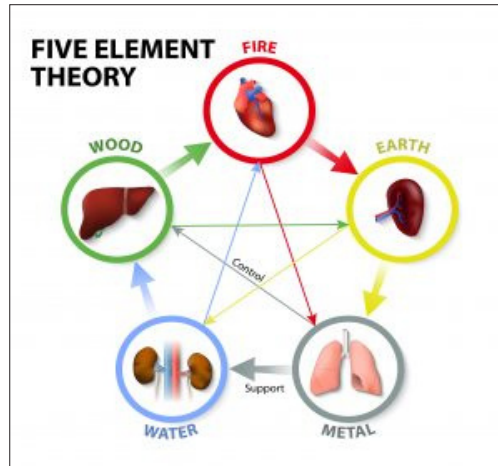


Fig 7. Five Elements Theory

These organs, as well as the elements in the theory will have two cycles. The cycle of generation and control. As represented in Figure 7, in the cycle of Generation, Fire generates Earth, Earth generates Metal, Metal generates Water, Water generates Wood, and Wood generates Fire. In the cycle of control, Fire controls Metal, Metal controls Wood, Wood controls Earth, and Earth controls Fire. In the cycle, all organs have the same importance, and they will control themselves in order to maintain health and equilibrium [17-18]

The main objective of this scheme of relationship between the organs, for the TCM physician is the comprehension of the body and the patient as whole. As we will see in the following section, everything around the patient will influence their energy health. When the Five Elements scheme is comprehended, the physician will finally be able to see the body as whole, with interconnections between the body, receiving external and internal influence, and, with this knowledge in hands, it will become easier to develop new ways of treatment. [17-18]

It is known that according to TCM, the main organ involved in the formation of headaches is the Liver. All foods, medications and emotions that imbalances the Liver meridian, may contribute to generate headaches or to maintain the symptom that already exists.

Chinese Dietary Therapy

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the diet is seen from the energy point view, in a different way from what is done in Western Medicine that observes the diet considering carbs, proteins, vitamins, calories, etc. [10-11]

In recent years, with the improvement of living standards and development of Chinese medicine, Dietary Therapy has gained strength and attracted international attention. Significant achievements have been made in scientific research, and the clinical application and teaching of TCM Dietary Therapy will surely develop and will make a useful contribution to the health and longevity of mankind. [10-11] According to Hippocrates, ca.460-ca.370 BC "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food." [19]

The properties of specific types of food are also expressed in their propensity towards a certain energy channel, which means that a certain food has a clear effect on a particular channel or channels (ie, the Internal Organs and their main and collateral channels), but have little or no effect on other channels. [20] The propensity for an energy channel is derived from the effects of food on the human body,

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considered in combination with the physiological and pathological internal organs and their channels. [10-11]

In the treatment for patients with chronic headaches, depending on the placement of the headache, it is possible to diagnose the headache according to the energy imbalances presented by the patient, as showed in the Introduction. [8-9] in the experience of the author; the diet that influences in the symptoms of headache, is the consumption of dairy products.

As the Liver and Gall-bladder are the two major organs involved in the generation of headaches in the energy level, the foods that has to be avoided are: frying foods, chocolate, eggs, honey, coconut, alcoholic beverages, dairy products, especially when the cheese is melted.

The patients also receive recommendations to avoid food that will imbalance the Spleen-pancreas, as the meridian of Spleen-pancreas is responsible for absorption of nutrients in the body. The foods to be avoided are: cold water, sweets, raw foods and dairy products.

Another recommendation is to avoid, coffee, soda and matte tea, when the Kidney and Bladder meridians are involved.

Auricular Acupuncture and Acupuncture

Originating in China, acupuncture is a therapeutic method that is characterized by inserting needles into the body surface, to treat disease and promote health. It has been recognized as a medical specialty by the Brazilian Federal Council of Medicine since 1995. [8] Different studies over the past 50 years, both in

China and in the West demonstrate the effects and effectiveness of acupuncture. [8]

Its active mechanism has been revealed in the light of current science, having physiological foundations. The insertion of the acupuncture needle stimulates nerve endings in the skin and underlying tissues especially muscles. A "message" generated by these stimuli follows through the peripheral nerve to the central nervous cord and brain. [8-9]

Auriculoacupuncture or Auricular Acupuncture is a specialty that focuses on the treatment of the framework presented, directly into the ear, thus toning pathogenic points. There are over 200 acupuncture points in the ear. [8-9]

In the daily practice of the author, the main point of view is to rebalance *Yin, Yang, Qi* and Blood, using the points on the ear, treating the root of the problem and the symptom at the same time, as demonstrated in the patient treated in 2007, with leg pain symptoms and high-intraocular pressure. [12-16]

Arndt-Schultz's Law

Another process commonly prescribed that might create energy worsening is the consumption of high-concentrated medications. The Arndt-Schultz law was used by the author to justify this decision. The study was originally formulated in 1888, stating the effects of different drug concentrations in an individual. They developed a rule, which would state for all substances: "*Small doses stimulate, moderate doses inhibit and overdoses kill*" (ARNDT-SCHULTZ, 1888), as showed in Figure 8. [12-16]

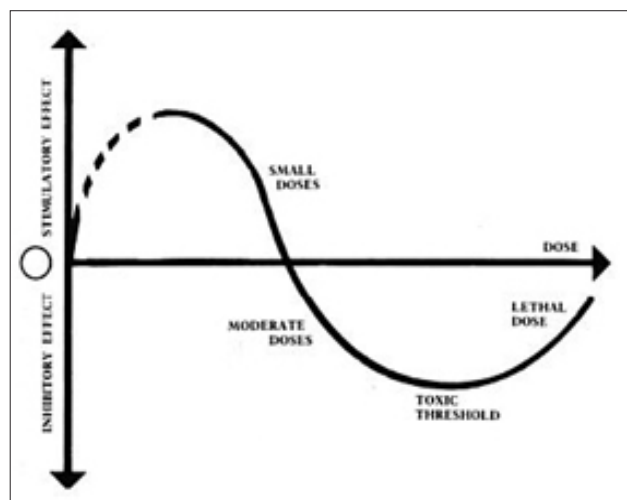


Fig 8. The Arndt-Schultz Law

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Based on the use of this law, drugs with high dilution can improve organic processes, while drugs too concentrated will harm health. Arndt-Schultz law is similar to the proposal of homeopathy, developed by Maturana and Varela, two Chilean researchers, who have proved this law and more, regarding dose sizes, and their role in stimulating or inhibiting the vitalities of living beings. [12-16]

The second proposed law of Arndt-Schultz's places the use of an infinitesimal dose, which would be so small, no molecules would be left in the substance and the results would be a gentle and fast cure of the pathology, with no side effects, allergic reactions or toxicity effects of any sort. [12-16]

Through review of literature regarding the treatment of headaches in Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine, as well as other ancient medical traditions, as the energy of the Liver is mostly responsible for the symptom of headaches, all medications in high-concentration that the patient may be taking may lead to a significant reduction of the vital energy, and also disrupting the energy of the Liver that is already imbalanced, in patients with headache symptoms. [12-16]

The idea of avoiding or reducing the consumption of high-concentrated medications (anti-inflammatories and painkillers) for headaches, is important for two reasons: 1. Reduce the aggression to the Liver meridian,

a meridian already compromised in patients with headaches, maintaining the symptoms. 2. Avoid the harm on the vital energy, which is important to prevent the formation of other diseases in the future, such as allergic reactions, diabetes, myocardial infarction, hypertension or even cancer, as demonstrated by the author in several congresses worldwide and published in varied articles.

Yin and Yang Metaphor of Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine

In order to treat patients with headaches as a whole and in a more effective way, the physician has to comprehend the importance of the different medicine perspectives. The body, and therefore, the possible treatments, is not only physical and constituted by organs and tissues. It is formed by energy. In Figure 8, a metaphor of *Yin* and *Yang* as the different kinds of medicine was created by the author. Nowadays, these two perspectives are separated, but they are different in perspective but can be complementary. One cannot exist without the other. [12-16]

Traditional Chinese medicine can be considered as *Yang* energy, and Western medicine is considered *Yin* energy, already materialized. In the same way of the relationship of the *Yin* and *Yang*, Traditional Chinese Medicine starts where Western Medicine ends, and vice-versa. The relationship is not static, but dynamic. [12-16]



Fig 8. Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine – Yin and Yang Metaphor.

CONCLUSION

With 65 (94.20%) of approval, it can be concluded that Auricular Acupuncture associated with Chinese dietary counselling was effective in the treatment of headaches of the patients analyzed. It was also possible to conclude we need to see the patient in a

holistic way, in order to perform the best treatment possible. Using the ancient knowledge of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the law of Arndt-Schultz and the teaching of Hippocrates showed great result in the majority of the patients, demonstrating how the non-individualized treatment for headaches and migraines is not the only possibility of treatment.

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