

Weighty Issues

Many people ask if acupuncture can help with weight loss. The answer is “it depends.” In my experience and opinion, the desire to lose weight is a multifaceted issue that can be connected to one or more of the following situations, which may or may not be able to be helped by acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine:

- poor eating habits/improper diet
- lack of knowledge about sound nutrition
- sound knowledge of nutrition but inability to follow through on one's own
- cravings, temptations (i.e. for sugary foods, carbohydrates, salt, fatty foods, etc.)
- lack of exercise
- excessive hunger/thirst
- slow metabolism
- hypothyroidism
- emotional eating
- distorted body image
- periods of dieting followed by periods of weight gain (yo-yo dieting)
- bulimia, exercise bulimia, bingeing and overeating

As you can see, weight may or may not be in one's control, as it may be due to habit, or a physiological, psychological and/or emotional condition.

In my experience, **acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can help to some degree with physiological weight gain/retention** (i.e. due to slow metabolism, hypothyroidism, water retention or excessive hunger/thirst), as well as with the increased desire to eat due to stress. In these situations, it is also suggested that other treatments for weight loss or maintenance be used concurrently (i.e. a healthy balanced diet, portion control, regular exercise), as **acupuncture and herbs alone are not a “cure.”**

It is also important to keep in mind that **losing and maintaining weight requires an entire lifestyle change that must be sustained over time in order to achieve and keep results.** Rather than approaching weight loss from the standpoint of “going on a diet,” it is healthier to change one's eating and exercise habits in a way that can be sustained over the long haul. Diets often do not work, because with the dieting mentality one generally looks forward to the day the diet will be over, believing that at this point he or she can return to eating anything, anytime, in any quantity desired, and by doing this, the weight is re-gained.

Attempting to lose weight is more difficult for some people than for others. There is no quick and easy fix, and it is important to know that losing weight takes time. While following a healthy weight loss course one would ideally lose 0.5–2 pounds per week. When losing more than this amount weight is almost always gained back, because in order to lose weight rapidly one generally eats in a restrictive manner that cannot be sustained over time, and/or because rapid weight loss usually signifies water loss as opposed to actual weight. Furthermore, each person's body generally falls to a “set weight” point within the normal BMI (body mass index) range, but the weight that is a healthy one for each individual varies and cannot be “chosen.” A “goal weight” isn't going to be achievable and sustainable if it is lower than your body's naturally “set weight.” Therefore, the most important goal for weight loss should be in becoming healthier and feeling better. When looked at from this perspective, it is easier to let go of unreasonable expectations and to have a more positive, patient and realistic outlook.

A traditional Chinese dietary and lifestyle handout is available and I would be happy to give it to you and point you toward the practices most suitable for your state of health.

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Because weight is such a personal issue, I am offering the **following list of references** that you can use to help yourself. I do not endorse any particular weight loss plan, as I think it is up to each and every individual to assess what works for himself/herself. I encourage a method that includes a healthy, balanced diet of no less than 1200 calories per day (1600 would be more appropriate for most people, and this number can vary depending on your sex, the amount you exercise and your current body weight and height). If you want a plan that is customized for you and ensures good health and a good outcome, I would recommend that you see a Registered Dietitian, Certified Nutritionist or Holistic Health Counselor.

-The Nutrition Source Healthy Eating Pyramid Published by the Harvard School of Public Health: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/pyramid/index.html>

Different from the U.S. government's Food Guide Pyramid, this guide is sensible and the website offers ample information on how to best balance your daily diet accordingly.

-Body Mass Index (BMI) Calculator from the NIH: <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>
The BMI can tell you whether you are within a normal weight range, overweight, obese or underweight.

-Massachusetts Eating Disorders Association (MEDA): <http://www.medainc.org/>
MEDA offers information on local support groups, treatment providers and centers.

-Overeaters Anonymous (OA): <http://www.oa.org>

-Food Addicts Anonymous (FA): <http://www.foodaddictsanonymous.org/>

OA and FA are 12-step programs of recovery, which address compulsive eating, overeating, bingeing, bulimia, anorexia, exercise bulimia and other eating disorders, as well as physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

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