



Klinik  
am Steigerwald

Chinesische Medizin und  
biologische Heilverfahren

# Polyneuropathy and TCM – Disease of the Peripheral Nerves

Polyneuropathy, a disease of the peripheral nerve fibres, is one of the illnesses that we treat in the clinic with good results. The patients are predominately people with severe forms of the disease. During the course of their often long history of illness, they had learned that they could not be helped. Considering how severely impaired these patients were, the results of the treatment are astounding. Preliminary studies indicate that for more than 50% of the patients there was already obvious improvement. The central method used in the clinic consists in the treatment with the Chinese phytotherapy that is complemented by acupuncture, physiotherapy and special diets.

## Clinical Picture

Medical science describes polyneuropathy as a gradual degeneration of peripheral nerves, starting at the ends. Inflammation processes are often involved in nerve degeneration. There are a number of causes for this. The disease is widespread among diabetics. Stress caused by toxic substances also appears to play an important role but it is not easy to prove this as the cause in individual cases. Dr. Remmers, a polyneuropathy specialist who worked as a neurologist in Gladbeck until he died 2006, had reported on the significant increase of this disease over the past years. In the case of most patients, the neurological findings are usually "polyneuropathy of undetermined origin". The symptoms expressed by polyneuropathy are pain, abnormal sensations, restless legs and the inability to walk or stand normally.

In typical cases, the affliction takes the following course: Usually gradual but continuously increasing from year to year, patients feel how their extremities die off. Beginning in the feet as a rule, sensations of numbness, tormenting abnormal sensations, pain and loss of feeling develop. Contact with the base is lost, walking becomes unsure, in the beginning on uneven ground, later everywhere. There, where earlier socks, shoes, the quality of a road cover, a meadow or the beach could be felt, is now just a numb, tormenting no-man's land. Along with feeling the ground, the feeling for your own weight and the reliability of being able to coordinate movements are lost as well. Finally, your own body is just a dead weight. It is manoeuvred through the world at great effort and the fear of falling is continuously present. Aids for walking become unavoidable, first a cane, then a wheeled walker and finally a wheel chair.

Throughout the years, the loss of feeling creeps up the legs and sooner or later hands and arms are also afflicted, finer work with your hands becomes difficult, closing buttons becomes impossible and ultimately it is not even possible to eat with a fork and knife. A common concomitant symptom is restless legs.

## Treatment of the Disease

Neurologists are of the opinion that there is no real therapy with which the disease process can be reversed or even only halted. Treatment is limited to regulating sugar levels and prescribing vitamins,

pain killers and psychopharmaceuticals for relief. Cortisone (inflammation blockers) and cytostatics (cancer medicine) are also sometimes used.

Chinese medicine, with its understanding of illness and its methods offers a road of therapy with astounding results. The central treatment method is Chinese medicinal therapy. On the one hand, their responsible application requires illness findings that were obtained based on modern medicine. But on the other hand, a diagnosis according to the rules of Chinese medicine must also be made so that a picture of the individual course of illness can be drawn. The reason behind this is that Chinese medicinal formulations consist of a composition of medicinal herbs that are designed for each individual case and modified according to the course of the respective therapy.

## Polyneuropathy from the Chinese Medicine Point of View

Chinese medicinal therapy for polyneuropathy is based on a certain understanding of disease. This understanding is not brought about by dismissing ourselves from modern Western medicine but by incorporating the Chinese insights to create a broader horizon. In the case of polyneuropathy, the Chinese term "tan", which is translated as phlegm in English, plays a major role. The term encompasses all undesired substances that continuously evade the clarifying and eliminating activities of the body. They have a tendency to accumulate with age and to sink into the lower regions of the body where they are deposited on tissue structures or the walls of capillaries. According to the Chinese definition of the term, they also have the tendency to develop an inflammatory, tissue-damaging potential. Since they impair micro-circulation in tissue and thus hinder supply and elimination, the process here is self-reinforcing. Once "congestion with phlegm" has begun, it keeps itself going ("auto-catalysis").

This view of the illness process corresponds to the fact that polyneuropathy is typically disease of the elderly. The question as to what the biochemical substrates are that are generally called "tan" according to the Chinese understanding remains unanswered. Their identification is a project for future research and will have to begin with the causes that are deemed certain: diabetes, toxin stress and paraproteins. There are good reasons for assuming that the biochemical substrates are protein molecules or fragments of these. Circulating "immune garbage" from everyday inflammations or the remains of tissue shedding come in question; but endogenic protein molecules should also be considered which have attracted the attention of the immune system by binding to toxic substances and are then treated by the immune system as foreign bodies. Paraproteins certainly belong to the substances that come in question (paraproteins are immune proteins incapable of functioning that are produced in excess quantities in certain white blood cell diseases).

With the aid of Chinese medicinal formulations it is obviously possible to dissolve these inflammatory conglomerates, bring the material back into circulation and eliminate it through the mucous membranes. During the phase when individual polyneuropathy symptoms improve, striking changes in excrements and other vegetative signs can be observed which indicate that these substances are being flushed out of the body. Chinese medicine describes this as "mobilisation, conversion and elimination of tan".

This healing process can be promoted by acupuncture and various physical therapeutic methods. Used alone, such external treatments do not have nearly the effect that they can develop in combination with Chinese medicinal therapy. The art of medicinal therapy is – to put it in a nutshell – properly modifying the basic formulations designed for the disease. They must be adapted again and again for each individual patient and to the individual course of therapy. The goal is to provoke the organism into a healthy reaction without overtaxing it.

## Therapy Success

From 1998 to 2009, the Klinik am Steigerwald treated approximately 850 patients with polyneuropathy with the aid of the methodology named above. Clearly more than 50% of them could be helped over the medium to long-term. For approximately 25% of them there was already obvious improvement the day they were released: the pain had subsided, the soles of their feet could once again feel the ground, they could enjoy a meadow again that had only caused them pain before and walking and standing had become easier. With the other patients, good therapy results appeared only after weeks or months of further out-patient treatment with Chinese medicine.

The results of treatment for restless legs and some forms of polyneuropathy caused by paraproteins are extremely good. The diabetic form of polyneuropathy caused by diabetes also responds very well to treatment. The positive trend was confirmed in the post-stationary treatment phase.

These good treatment results motivated the doctors at the clinic to undertake a "polyneuropathy therapy study". The purpose of this study is to objectivize the results of treatment and thus aid in distinguishing the efficacy of the therapy according to the subtypes of polyneuropathy. By this means, fundamentals for further development and refinement of therapy methods are to be established.