Clara Cohen: Have you ever looked at an acupuncture protocol in a book or online and thought, well, this is great, but what do I do?

Do I actually tonify this acupuncture point?

Do I sedate this acupuncture point? You're not alone.

This is the number one question I get. Clara, do I sedate this or do I tonify it? Today my friend, we are fixing that one for good. I'm answering your question about what to do, what to sedate, what to tonify where we are in practice.

We're gonna look at root pattern versus branch, deficiency versus excess, mixed patterns, which I think that's what we see the most in practice.

And not only I'm gonna talk about sedating and tonifying, but I'm gonna look at the techniques. What are the techniques for sedating versus tonifying? I'm gonna give you mini' cases, and example. So hopefully that question can be put to rest. Are you ready? Let's go.

Welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host, Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture, because after all, acupuncture rocks

The number one question student ask is, I have the protocol right here, but do I sedate or tonify these points?

The problem is we're trying to decide the technique before getting the right diagnosis. Treating all points the same is probably not the solution. Guessing instead of applying logic. Now how do we fix it?

Let the diagnosis decide. Excess pattern, always sedate Deficiency pattern, always tonify. Mix pattern. This is what we're gonna talk about, strategies.

Before we continue, I wanna make sure we understand what an excess pattern is versus a deficiency. And you're like, Clara, I think I know what a deficiency in excess pattern is.

Yes, you do. Because every time it says deficiency, you kind of know it's a deficiency. Right? When we hear yin deficiency, yang deficiency, Qi, blood deficiency. We know it's a deficiency pattern. A spleen she sinking is also a deficiency pattern. We all agree, however, people get mixed up because if it says excess heat, okay, we know that's excess, right?

Liver yang rising is excess. But a blood stasis, a liver qi stagnation, that is also excess. So I always teach my students that if it doesn't say deficiency, it is an excess except. for spleen qi sinking. Make sense? So

Everything that doesn't say the word deficiency is an excess

excess dampness, excess heat, right?

This is all going to be excess liver blood stasis, liver yang rising, liver fire. We got that right? So let's just review a little bit of foundation because I think sometimes it's important to do so.

So we wanna identify the pattern and we wanna differentiate the symptoms. When there is a deficiency, if we compare it to excess yin versus yang, right? The length of disease, a long chronic is gonna be more deficient than a short acute, which is more excess. Now, this is when we compare the two.

Do not think that all long chronic disorders are all deficiency. It's when we compare to short and acute make sense? However, a weak energy or fatigue, of course, is depletion, which is inefficiency versus someone that has a lot of energy that's more hyper, that's more excess. A weak, low voice is always a deficiency versus a strong, loud voice like mine, that's more of an excess if there is pain.

If the person enjoys a massage, enjoys a rub, enjoys the pressure that is a deficiency. If they do not wanna be touched they dislike a massage. That's in excess. Okay. A pulse that is weak. Deep thin is always a deficiency. A pulse that is big, large, full, forceful is always in excess.

So obviously for a deficiency we tonify and for an excess we sedate The diagnosis tells you the technique, not the other way around.

Let's start with excess. We wanna move, if there's a stagnation, we wanna clear if there's an excess dampness, excess heat. We wanna move. If there's liver qi stagnation, blood stasis, we wanna clear if there's excess pathogen and if there's a lot of rising like liver yang rising, we wanna bring the liver yang down.

That's our treatment principle. But that's all under the sedate. Technique. Now the needle insertion and withdrawal with sedating is we're gonna insert quickly and withdraw slowly. We're gonna leave the hole open.

What does that mean? It means that we're not gonna use a cotton ball to close and keep the qi in when we take the needle out. So we leave it open, meaning we're not gonna put the cotton ball on it right away, unless if it's bleeding, of course. And you have to wipe so we can let. The pathogen out. Okay. We can shake the needle slightly on removal as well.

The direction and rotation. When we are sedating, we are going to go against the meridian flow.

Meaning if it's a lung meridian, for example, it starts at the chest and it's direction as it goes down along the arm and finishes at the thumb.

So it's direction is from the chest to the thumb. So if we're going to do, let's say lung seven, and we wanna sedate, we're gonna go against the flow, meaning we are going to needle lung seven towards the elbow on an angle that's going to be oblique. That's sedating? Yes.

We can also add up some rotation that should be rapid with large amplitude, and usually it's counterclockwise rotation.

When we sedate we're gonna lift firmly up and thrust lightly down. Insert the needle as the patient. Inhale. Withdraw the needle as the patient ex Some example of sedating would be using liver. Two for liver yang rising. Liver, three for liver qi stagnation, gallbladder 20 for wind, spleen, nine for dampness. Right? That makes sense.

A lot of xi cleft points like the yang Sheik cleft points specifically are usually used for excess pathogen to remove the pathogen and release the pain.

Yin Spring point are also really good to clear excess heat.

so for sedating, think fast in, slow out and leave the hole open for the pathogen to escape.

Now you'll see when we tify, everything is in we reverse. So instead of trying to memorize both, just memorize one and know that the other one is everything in the opposite.

Ad: If you still struggle to come up with the right treatment protocol for your patients, you are going to love my third book. By popular demand, I have created a guide for TCM treatments for over 160 common syndromes with acupuncture points, herbal formula, ear points, diet, and so much more, including many, many of my clinical pearls.

It is the game changer for acupuncture students and specifically for practitioners. You can download the digital version on any device, and it comes with many video links to complement it. Or if you're like me and you'd rather have a hard copy version, the publisher ships it all over the world. But before you invest in my Chinese Medicine Treatments Made Easy, I wanna make sure it's everything you were looking for so you can download a sample of it.

Listen to what people who invest in this book had to say. "Thank you, Clara. This is exactly what I needed. I love how you organized this book. It's truly helping me in my first year in practice." Yay . "So excited. Bought it immediately. It will be a great resource for studying for boards." That's awesome. "Oh my God, I immediately purchased this, and it is such a bargain price that I almost feel ashamed for paying what I believe is worth of much, much more.

Even as an experienced practitioner for over 10 years, I like your stuff just as much and benefit from it." Yay! All this is just so rewarding for me. So I hope you get your copy if you don't have one. The link is in the show notes below, or you can go to my website, acupointacademy.com, and click the shop tab on the menu bar.

You won't regret it. I put so much heart and soul in it. I hope you enjoy it and benefit from it, and in turn, your patients do as well.

Clara Cohen: So let's look at Tonifying.

We're gonna build what's deficient, of course. So the way we insert the needle is very slow in, but withdrawing quickly. And then we wanna close the hole after with a cotton ball to keep the qi in. We don't want the qi to escape. Does that make sense?

For tonifying, the direction of the needle is going to be always with the flow of the meridian. So when we were talking about lung seven, for example, we are going to be oblique towards the thumb.

That is going to be the angle that goes with the flow of the meridian because the meridian finishes at the thumb. Now, a lot of people ask me, do I do this with every point? No. A lot of the points are perpendicular, so you don't have to add this up. It's only for points that are oblique. Like Du 20 is the same thing.

We can angle it towards the nose, which means it's going with the flow of the meridian, so that's tonifying. Or we can angle it towards the back of the head, which means against the meridian, and we are calming, bringing the energy down while with the meridian, we are lifting the energy. Make sense? Not every point is oblique.

Remember that if we have stomach 36, for example, it is a perpendicular point. So we don't have to worry about the angle. You don't have to worry about all this for every point. That's the good magic that acupuncture is.

Now when it comes to the rotation for tonifying, we wanna rotate gently clockwise with small movement, and we're gonna have a small amplitude we wanna insert as patient exhales.

So it's the opposite, and we wanna withdraw the needle as the patient. Inhale. Common points that we use. Of course when it comes to tonifying, our stomach 36, spleen six, kidney three, kidney six, ren four, du four. We have a lot of points that can tonify, right? . Yuan source points are great to tonify, backs, shell points are great. to tonify. for example, bladder 23 back shu point of the kidneys. Very good to tonify the kidneys. So we can use that point. Now, if you're doing bladder 23, you are going perpendicular.

You don't have to worry about it. And then here's what we do.

We insert slowly and withdraw fast, slowly in, fast out, slowly in, fast out. Okay, so that's tonifying. When you are stimulating, you are doing clockwise, very small amplitude, and you, you're going much slower, right? Compared to sedating, where it's much faster and bigger amplitude. We're doing little ones like this.

Make sense and we are going to go clockwise and remember that we always close the hole to preserve qi when we are tonifying a point.

So for tonifying, think slow in, fast out, and close the hole.

So a quick recap. Insertion for tonifying. Slow in withdraw. Quick out and close the hole for sedating opposite insertion. Very quick in, slow out, and leave the

hole open to expel the pathogen Rotation for tonifying is gentle clockwise, small amplitude, and slow. While for sedating we go strong.

Big amplitude counterclockwise. Much stronger, right?

for thrusting, you go heavy in. Light lift, heavy in light lift. For sedating, we go light thrust or light in and heavy lift. Direction. With the meridian flow, we turn a fire against the meridian flow. We sedate, we insert on excel for patients that are deficient and we insert on inhale for patient that are excess but no matter what, always obtain de qi. What does that mean? When you are inserting the needle, you want to find de qi, what does that feel like? If you've ever gone fishing, it feels like a little tuck, a little.

You got the fish and so your fish line, there is a tuck.

It's very slight. It's so minor that if you're not present while you're trying to found their chi, you'll not understand that you got it. Okay. So you can ask patients for, are you feeling this?

And they're like, oh yeah, that's really strong. Then maybe you didn't feel it, but they did. Until you practice a lot, you'll feel de qi. In some patients, it's much easier. In some points it's much easier than others. So give yourself some grace. If some points, you can't quite found it, it's okay. It's practice, but also patients are very weak, very deficient.

It's very hard to found their qi because their qi is so weak. So give yourself some grace. It'll be much easier to found qi with excess patients.

Now you always have to tell patients that they can feel like a heaviness, a tingling sensation, a distending sensation. That means that qi has arrived and has connected with the needle. Right? So this is what it should feel like.

Use your patients as you communicating partner so you can both figure out where we are.

Have we found de qi?

Now we've talked about excess versus deficiency, right? And we've talked about points. Very basic. Now let's talk about mixed patterns and what do we do?

So the real clinical challenge is, let's say someone has irritable bowel syndrome with irritable bowel syndrome. The diagnosis is liver qi stagnation, which is in excess, creating spleen.

She deficiency. So now we have the excess and the deficiency, right?

So students will ask liver three Is part of the protocol, do I sedate it? Do I tonify? What do I do if spleen six, do I sedate it? Do I tonify it?

Well, when you select acupuncture points, there are for a specific reason, liver three for irritable bowel syndrome, for example, your reason is it moves That's pretty much why you are using it. So if it moves Qi, and that's the reason you use it, you are going to use it for liver qi stagnation, so you're gonna have to sedate it.

The reason why you are using spleen six is probably to tonify spleen, right? Because it's affected by the liver qi stagnation or liver overacting or over controlling spleen, and that creates some spleen qi deficiencies. So you are probably gonna tonify spleen six. So that means that some points in mixed patterns are going to be sedated and some points are going to be tonified.

Let me walk you through three mini cases so we can really put this in practice.

We have a stressed and exhausted 27-year-old woman who works at a desk.

So her desk job is very highly stressful. She has tension headaches specifically at the end of the day. So tension headaches usually comes from stress, right? So that's a liver. qi stagnation with some liver. yang rising that gets worse at the end of the day when she's more stressed. She has bloating and loose tools.

We know loose tools is obviously often a spleen qi deficiency. Bloating can come from sitting all day liver qi stagnation and or spleen qi deficiency, not being able to transform and transport. But we're gonna see on her tongue it is pale with teeth marks. It's scalloped. So there is a spleen deficiency, right?

She also has irregular periods, but I'm not gonna focus on this today 'cause I want just a mini case to show you how we go about sedating and tonifying.

She's irritable. That's a liver qi stagnation becoming liver yang rising, and a pulse is thin and weak. Specifically

At the middle, right position, which is the spleen position.

So what do we do? We have a liver qi stagnation excess plus the spleen qi deficiency, right?

We wanna sedate liver three, liver 14 and gallbladder 34. We wanna tonify stomach 36 to tonify the digestive system, spleen six to tonify the spleen, of course, Ren 12 to help the stomach or the digestive system. You can also add the Yuan source point of spleen, which is spleen three.

You're going to be with the flow of the meridian stomach. 36 is perpendicular, so we don't have to worry. Same thing with spleen six. However, if you are doing spleen three, you go with the flow of the meridian, which means towards the ankle going up, right? And you wanna do gentle stimulation and you can retain the needles a bit longer if you wanted to, although you don't have to do that.

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I give you free PDF case studies. So many tips and tricks on how to improve the way you understand as grasp TCM. You cannot miss it. And if you don't like it, you can unsubscribe anytime. The link is below for you. Make sure you get on it.

Before we continue of the next case, I'm going to be really, truly honest with you. I don't do a lot of stimulation, which means I don't do a lot of sedating and tonifying. I prefer myself as a patient. When my body goes and does the work with the needles and self-regulate, I don't like to have my needle stimulating.

I feel like I'm just more calm, more relaxed. Most of the time. I meditate during my session and I feel like it works really well for me. So because of this, I don't do a lot of stimulation. With my patients. However, if the patient is really excess, I will absolutely sedate and stimulate. If the patient's very weak, let's say it's an 80-year-old woman that's very deficient, does not have any excess, I won't stimulate the needles.

I'm just gonna let them be. And then just let the patient relax so you don't have to always sedate and tonify. . And of course, we can adapt to each patient. Some patients don't like stimulations at all. Then I don't do it. Okay, so this is just a guide to help you understand, but

Always follow your gut, your intuition, your intention behind each needle for each patient.

We have a 40-year-old male that works at a desk as well, has insomnia. And a lot of stress. So one of the symptoms that he has is temporal headaches, just like the patient before, but he also has low back soreness or aches.

He has tendency to have constipation, specifically dry pebbles. He has difficulty sleeping specifically between two and 3:00 AM which we know is liver time. He also has night sweats, dry mouth and dry throat at night. His tongue is thin. Dry and cracked with a red tip, and he has also tinnitus, high pitch tinnitus.

His pulse is thin, rapid, and slightly weak. So we can see with this case that there is yin deficiency. Right the night sweat, the dry mouth at night. That is more yin deficiency. It's probably a kidney yin deficiency because of the chronic low back soreness as well. He also has insomnia where you wake up between two and 3:00 AM That is more liver, yang rising.

Why? Because there's also high pitched tinnius. There's temporal headache, so that's the stress that's coming up.

Again, we have an excess and a deficiency. We're gonna sedate with liver. Two to bring liver yang down. Gallbladder 20 is great to bring that liver yang down as well. Liver three to obviously move liver qi because if there's liver yang rising,

liver. yang rising always comes from liver qi stagnation when there's stress, right? So we can also use other points to bring the energy down. Let's say there's high-pitched tinnitus, so of course you can use points like gallbladder two, which is right on the tragus in front of the ear and other points like san jiao five is a great point for tinnitus.

As well when it's high pitch, right? There's many more points. I'm not focusing on this, I'm focusing on the sedating versus tonifying, right? So for the sedating point, we wanna reduce, we wanna go against the flow. So liver three, liver two can go against the flow.

Would I do liver two and liver three on both side?

Bilateral three, no, I would do liver two on one side, liver three on the other side. I am of the school of thoughts, the least amount of needles the better the treatment.

Then when it comes to tonify, we want Tonify Kidney Yin, so kidney three is great, kidney six is great. They both tonify. Kidney yin. spleen six is also a good point for yin deficiency.

There's a lot of points we can use to tonify Kidney Yin. We could use kidney seven, which is great for night sweats. Heart six is also good for night sweat, insomnia when there is yin deficiency.

So that works really well as well. Right? And the tip of his tongue is red. That means there's a bit of heart yin deficiency that's showing up as well. Although there's not a lot of symptoms that correlate with it yet. We wanna go with the flow.

I would definitely do kidney six with the flow kidney three. I keep it perpendicular. Spleen six, same thing, Ren four, same thing, right? But if I was going to do heart six, I could go with the flow kidney seven, I would go with the flow. And of course we are doing gentle stimulation.

Ad Before we continue with today's episode, I wanna share something that honestly feels like a big moment for me. If you've been following me for a while, you know I've always said no to all sponsorships. I've been approached many times, but I turn them all down because if I don't genuinely use a product or love it, I will never recommend it to you.

But today is different. I am super excited to introduce my very first sponsor, drum roll please, Jane App. I'm also a Jane ambassador, so this is a company I actually use and love. I am saying yes because I've used Jane for years in my own multidisciplinary clinic. Truly, it's the best practice management software and electronic medical record I've ever worked with.

Before Jane, we were using a clunky system that made everything harder than it needed to be. When we switched, the entire clinic felt the difference immediately. Jane is built by people who actually understand what it's like to be a practitioner running a busy practice. One of my favorite features is online booking.

There is nothing better than waking up and seeing patients booking their own appointment while I was asleep. Your patients can book when it works for them, and the wait list feature fills last-minute cancellations automatically. I love that. I used to spend so much time calling eight to 10 people just to fill up one spot.

Jane also automates the things we never enjoy doing, like intake forms, reminders, confirmation. It honestly feels like having an extra assistant handling all the moving parts so you can focus on what really matters, which is supporting your patients and being the TCM rockstar practitioner you truly are.

There are so many features I could talk about, but we would be here all day. If you're looking for a system that brings more ease, more clarity, and calm into your practice, I truly recommend Jane. You can check it out at jane.app/demo, and because you're part of the AcuPro community, you can use my code AcuPro1MO, one month, when you sign up to get a one-month grace period on your new account.

The link and the code are also in the show notes below for you. Now, let's get back to today's episode.

Clara Cohen: Now let's look at the last mini case. We have a student that's 19-year-old that's going to university, and her major complaint is fatigue. She also have brain fog and cannot retain information while she's studying. She has mental fatigue and restlessness at the same time. She feels very.

Heavy legs. Like it's really hard for her to walk 'cause she feels like her legs are super heavy. She has smelly loose stools. That's interesting, right? She's restless and she's tired. So mental restlessness, but tired physically. She has a burning sensation when she urinates her tongue has a thick, greasy, yellow coat.

She also has tinnitus where she feels like her ear is full and it's buzzing. And the pulse is mostly slippery.

So with her there is damp heat in the lower jiao because there's that burning sensation and there's also a greasy yellow coat on the tongue and there is smelly stools. Now if it's loose stools. Without a smell. It's a spleen qi deficiency. If it's smelly, then there is damp heat in the lower jiao.

So in this instance, there's also the fatigue and the heavy legs, which means there's dampness, but also spleen qi deficiency. But there's also the damp heat, right? So she's tired, but she has that burning sensation. so it's a lot more excess. Than deficiency. In this case, we can sedate spleen nine. Best point for dampness bladder 22.

Also, the Sanja backhoe point clears dampness. Now we can also sedate large intestine. 11. Great point to clear heat overall if there is burning sensation when she pees. It is due for this patient to cystitis, so it's not an infection, it's just

inflammation of the urethra. So we can use liver five as one of the best point to clear the heat when it's affecting the urination.

So that's a great point to add. Then we can, of course tonify with spleen three, spleen six, stomach three, six because she's really tired, right? We could use points like Du 20 to lift the energy. There's a lot of points you can use, but basically we can tonify some points and sedate other points.

Now what's interesting about spleen six is that it can sedate and it can tonify. Du 20, can sedate and tonify. Lung seven is the same thing, so that's the good part about it. So how do we know if we use it with. One way or the other. Now with Du 20 and lung seven, it depends on the direction you are doing your insertion in the oblique way, with or against the Meridian.

With Spleen six, it's a perpendicular insertion, so it doesn't tell us. So think of Spleen six as part of the protocol. It knows what to do. It knows that it needs to rebalance everything, but it does both. So the great part about spleen six is that it's gonna help get rid of the dampness, but it's also gonna help to tonify the spleen.

So it kind of goes and does both, which makes sense because if there's spleen, qi deficiency, there will be dampness. And if there's dampness for a long time spleen, qi will be affected. The two are connected. So spleen six. Perfect point To balance both the excess and the deficiency, then we don't have to worry.

It's magic.

To recap your three step decision framework. Use the mental checklist at the treatment table every single time. What is the pattern? Excess deficiency or mixed. Look at the tongue, pulse, duration, energy level, all your symptoms, and make sure you have a diagnosis.

Now, if you still think, I don't know what my diagnosis. Is, I have a masterclass I created just for you. It is how to select acupuncture point. Even when you're not a hundred percent sure of your diagnosis, it's 90 minutes, you get Cs, and the feedback on this has been amazing because it was needed to be able to pick points at the beginning.

Sometimes it's hard, right? We are like, oh, I don't, I'm not really sure what the diagnosis is. And as we see the patients more and more. We come up with a better diagnosis. So in the meantime, I teach you how to select point, even when you're not sure of your TCM diagnosis. The link is below for you.

The second is, what is today's priority? Do we wanna relieve the acute symptoms and focus on this, which is the branch? Or do we wanna build and strengthen long term, which is the root.

So often when we see someone, they come for,

let's say, low back pain, we're probably just gonna sedate and clear that low back pain.

That's very acute, right? And then as we go, we wanna strengthen the lumbar, strengthen the kidney, strengthen the back, that's the root so the patient does not get the recurring acute low back pain. Does that make sense? So you can focus just on the symptoms sometimes for the first time, and then you start building.

You can do both as well. Again, follow your intention with each patient.

And then you wanna choose your technique and your tools for excess points. We wanna sedate, reduce, we can do cupping, for example. We can do bleeding techniques for deficiency. We can tonify. We're much more gentle. We want to moxa. This is the perfect three step decision framework.

Diagnose first and always the technique will follow naturally.

Guess what? You've got this. I hope this was truly useful because I know it's a big question that people ask all the time and you can now know what to do next time when you have a patient that is excess deficient or mixed pattern, which is probably what we see most in practice.

Thank you so much for your support. No matter if you sedate tonify, remember acupuncture rocks.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. I truly hope you benefited from this episode, and I would love for you to share it with a friend that may benefit from it as well. Follow the show, leave a review, and if you want more, go to my website, acuproacademy.com. I have tons of resources there with treatment protocols, case studies, free courses, and so much more.

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