



My Experience with Traditional Chinese Medicine and LAF

By Wanda Craig

It was a beautiful spring day in Charlotte, North Carolina about 4 years ago. My husband and I were eating chicken Caesar salads at a sidewalk café and enjoying the warm sunshine. All was well in my world. Suddenly, my heart began racing. I was concerned but not alarmed, so I did not go to the doctor until the next day. My doctor ordered a series of tests and heart monitoring. I was diagnosed with arrhythmia—lone atrial fibrillation (LAF). My heart was strong, my thyroid was functioning well, my blood chemistry was normal—they found nothing to blame. “It’s just one of those things,” she said. I was immediately put on Coumadin, a blood thinner, and also Diltiazem. Later, because I was only 52 at the time, my cardiologist took me off Coumadin but prescribed low-dosage aspirin therapy. I told him I had been on the Atkins Diet for about a month and asked if that could have triggered it. He did not think it did, but to this day I am convinced that the change in diet upset my body’s balance.

For about six months, I felt much better and had episodes about once a month that lasted a couple of hours. Then my ankles began swelling to twice their size, so my cardiologist put me on flecainide, which I took for over three years. Even on medication, I continued to have intermittent episodes several times a week that lasted for several hours. Common triggers were cold drinks, alcohol, caffeine, and stress. My cardiologist said “break-throughs” while on medication were normal. But I felt tired all the time and could sense that my body was getting weaker. One morning I woke up and decided I was going to heal myself.

After reading some research by Dr. Lam I increased my dosage of CoQ10 to 200 mg/day and added magnesium, fish oil, L-Carnitine, and Lipoic Acid. I also decided to try acupuncture to return my body to balance. Li Jie Chu, a wonderful acupuncturist in Charlotte, felt confident she could help me. She prescribed two acupuncture treatments a week and Chinese herbs to take twice daily. After two months, I could tell I was getting stronger, so I decreased my flecainide by taking one pill each night instead of the usual twice a day. My heart went crazy, so I had to go back to taking the prescribed dosage twice a day. After a few weeks, I then tried taking half of a pill twice a day to keep the dosage more even, but I began having frequent AF episodes, so I returned again to taking two 50 mg pills a day. I was getting discouraged. After three months of acupuncture, I was no closer to being drug free, so I decided to stop the treatments. Then my inner “wise woman” voice said, “Keep going.” So I kept going and tried again to wean myself off the flecainide. This time when I took just one pill each night, I had no problems. I continued this dosage for about a month, and then began taking one pill every other night. At first, I had short, mild AF episodes as my body was learning its rhythm again. As Li Jie reminded me, my heart had “forgotten” how to function without drugs. After another month, I stopped the flecainide altogether. I took my last pill on October 31, 2006—Halloween night. My heartbeat has continued to grow steady, and after eight months of acupuncture, I feel great. I am finally drug free.

A couple of words of caution are in order. It is never wise to stop your medication without medical supervision. I asked my doctor and cardiologist to help me find a natural treatment. Neither signed on to help me, so I did it on my own out of desperation. I understood the risk, but I felt the risk of staying on medication the rest of my life was worse. While I am happy to share my happy ending, I also do not want to be responsible for anyone taking risks without understanding the potential consequences. I chose not to live in fear and dependence, but you have to make those decisions for yourself.

Another thing to keep in mind is that I also made significant lifestyle changes. I began yoga and learned to breathe properly, which helps regulate the nervous system. I continue to take all the supplements listed above plus the Chinese herbs and eat a balanced diet of fish, chicken, fruit and vegetables. I gave up alcohol completely, limit caffeine, and drink lots of water. The benefits are definitely worth the small sacrifices I have made.

I encourage anyone suffering from LAF to do the research, try acupuncture with a certified practitioner, take heart-healthy supplements, pay attention to your body's reaction to what you eat and drink, and above all—do not give up. I believe LAF is a symptom of the body's imbalance and can be managed without drugs. My story has a happy ending, and I believe yours can too.

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