

HERBAL RHYMES



10 Must-Know Acupuncture Points for Board Exams

Free Sample

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The 10 highest-yield points that appear on every NCCAOM & state board exam — with clinical pearls, memory tricks, and board-focused review.

Reference: A Manual of Acupuncture (Deadman, Al-Khafaji & Baker)

How to Use This Guide

Your board exam secret weapon

These 10 acupuncture points are the highest-yield points for the NCCAOM and state licensing board exams. They appear in multiple question formats — location, indications, point categories, contraindications, and clinical reasoning — making them essential to master.

For each point, you'll find:

WHAT'S INSIDE EACH ENTRY

Point Categories — Every category the point belongs to (Yuan-Source, Luo-Connecting, Command Points, etc.). Boards love testing these.

LOCATION

Precise anatomical location per Deadman's *A Manual of Acupuncture* — the gold standard reference.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

The most frequently tested indications for each point, organized by clinical relevance.

BOARD PEARL

High-yield exam tips — the kind of clinical reasoning that separates correct answers from distractors.

MEMORY TRICK

A short, punchy mnemonic to lock the point's key features into long-term memory.

CONTRAINDICATIONS & CAUTIONS

Safety information the boards test — especially pregnancy contraindications and needling depth cautions.

Study tip: Don't just read passively. Cover the indications and try to recall them from memory. Active recall is the single most effective study strategy for board exams.

1. LI-4

Hé Gǔ — Joining Valley

CHANNEL Large Intestine (Hand Yangming)

POINT CATEGORIES

Yuan-Source Point

Command Point — Face & Mouth

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

Sun Si-miao Ghost Point (Guì Xīn)

LOCATION On the dorsum of the hand, between the 1st and 2nd metacarpal bones, approximately in the middle of the 2nd metacarpal bone on the radial side.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Headache (all types — frontal, vertex, occipital)
- ▶ Facial pain, toothache, trigeminal neuralgia
- ▶ Nasal congestion, rhinitis, sinusitis, epistaxis
- ▶ Common cold, fever, Wind-Heat or Wind-Cold invasion
- ▶ Delayed labor, dysmenorrhea (promotes labor — contraindicated in pregnancy)

BOARD PEARL

LI-4 and LV-3 together form the "**Four Gates**" (Sì Guān) — the most tested point combination on the boards. Together they powerfully move Qi and Blood, calm the spirit, and treat pain throughout the body. LI-4 is the #1 point for any condition of the face and mouth. As the Yuan-Source point of the Large Intestine, it draws on the original Qi from the Kidneys to support the channel's exterior-releasing function.

MEMORY TRICK

"LI-4 is the Gate to the Face" — Joining Valley opens every door above the neck. Toothache? Face pain? Stuffy nose? LI-4. Always.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

CONTRAINDICATED in pregnancy — strongly promotes labor and may cause miscarriage. This is a top board question. Exception: used at full term to promote labor.

2. ST-36

Zú Sān Lǐ — Leg Three Miles

CHANNEL Stomach (Foot Yangming)

POINT CATEGORIES

He-Sea Point

Command Point — Abdomen

Sea of Nourishment Point

Earth Point of Earth Channel

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

Sun Si-miao Ghost Point

LOCATION 3 cun below ST-35 (Dúbí), one finger-breadth lateral to the anterior crest of the tibia, in the tibialis anterior muscle.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Epigastric pain, nausea, vomiting, abdominal distension
- ▶ Diarrhea, dysentery, constipation (regulates the intestines)
- ▶ General weakness, fatigue, chronic disease (tonifies Qi and Blood)
- ▶ Knee pain, lower leg weakness, atrophy of leg muscles
- ▶ Dizziness, mental disorders, mania (calms the spirit)

BOARD PEARL

ST-36 is the single most important point for **tonifying Qi and Blood** and strengthening the Spleen and Stomach. It is the #1 point for any abdominal or digestive complaint. As the He-Sea point, it treats disorders of the yangming Fu organ (Stomach/Intestines). The name "Three Miles" reflects that moxibustion here was used by travelers to sustain stamina — boards test this as the key point for fatigue and weakness.

MEMORY TRICK

"ST-36 walks Three Miles on a full stomach." Digestion, energy, and strong legs — all in one point. The belly's best friend.

CAUTIONS

Traditionally contraindicated for moxibustion in those under 30 (classical text prohibition). Avoid deep needling laterally to prevent injury to the anterior tibial artery.

3. SP-6

Sān Yīn Jiāo — Three Yīn Intersection

CHANNEL Spleen (Foot Taiyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Group Luo — Meeting of 3 Leg Yīn Channels (SP, LV, KD)

LOCATION 3 cun above the prominence of the medial malleolus, on the posterior border of the medial aspect of the tibia.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Gynecological disorders — irregular menstruation, dysmenorrhea, amenorrhea
- ▶ Infertility, difficult labor, insufficient lactation
- ▶ Urogenital disorders — urinary difficulty, nocturnal enuresis
- ▶ Abdominal distension, borborygmus, diarrhea (Spleen Qi deficiency)
- ▶ Insomnia, emotional disorders (nourishes Yin, calms the spirit)

BOARD PEARL

SP-6 is the **#1 point for gynecology** and any condition involving the uterus. Because it is the meeting point of all three leg Yīn channels (Spleen, Liver, Kidney), it simultaneously tonifies Spleen Qi, smooths Liver Qi, and nourishes Kidney Yin — making it the ideal point for Blood deficiency, Yin deficiency, and Dampness. Boards always pair SP-6 with gynecological case questions.

MEMORY TRICK

"Three Yīn meet at Six" — SP, LV, KD all cross at SP-6. Three channels, one point, all things gynecological.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

CONTRAINDICATED in pregnancy (strongly promotes labor and descends the fetus). This is one of the most frequently tested pregnancy contraindications alongside LI-4.

4. LV-3

Tài Chōng — Great Surge

CHANNEL Liver (Foot Jueyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Yuan-Source Point

Shu-Stream Point

Earth Point

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

LOCATION On the dorsum of the foot, in the depression distal to the junction of the 1st and 2nd metatarsal bones.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Headache (especially vertex and temporal), dizziness, hypertension
- ▶ Irritability, anger, depression, emotional instability (Liver Qi stagnation)
- ▶ Eye disorders — redness, swelling, blurred vision, glaucoma
- ▶ Irregular menstruation, dysmenorrhea, PMS
- ▶ Spasm and pain of the lower extremity, flank pain, hernia

BOARD PEARL

LV-3 is the **#1 point for Liver Qi stagnation** and Liver Yang rising. As both the Yuan-Source and Shu-Stream point, it has a dual function: it can both sedate (subdue Liver Yang/Wind) and tonify (nourish Liver Blood/Yin). Combined with LI-4 as the "Four Gates," it is the most tested point pair on the boards. LV-3 is to the foot what LI-4 is to the hand — same anatomical position, mirror channels.

MEMORY TRICK

"Great Surge calms the Great Rage." Liver Yang surging up? LV-3 brings it back down. Anger, headache, red eyes — all rising Liver energy.

CAUTIONS

Use with care in pregnancy — its strong Qi- and Blood-moving action may affect the fetus. Avoid deep perpendicular needling toward the dorsal pedal artery.

5. PC-6

Nèi Guān — Inner Pass

CHANNEL Pericardium (Hand Jueyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Luo-Connecting Point

Confluent Point — Yin Wei Mai

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

LOCATION 2 cun above the transverse crease of the wrist, between the tendons of palmaris longus and flexor carpi radialis.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Cardiac pain, palpitations, chest tightness, angina
- ▶ Nausea, vomiting, hiccup, morning sickness (the anti-nausea point)
- ▶ Epigastric pain, stomach pain (the Pericardium connects to the Middle Jiao)
- ▶ Insomnia, anxiety, mental disorders, epilepsy (calms the spirit)
- ▶ Motion sickness, post-operative nausea

BOARD PEARL

PC-6 is the **#1 point for nausea and chest/cardiac conditions**. Its Yin Wei Mai confluent point status means it connects all the Yin channels — this is why it treats both the Heart (chest) and Stomach (epigastrium). Paired with SP-4 (confluent of Chong Mai), they open Yin Wei Mai and Chong Mai together — the classic pair for heart, chest, and stomach disorders. Boards test this pairing frequently.

MEMORY TRICK

"Inner Pass to the Heart and Stomach." Nausea on a boat? Chest pain? Anxiety? PC-6 is the wristband acupressure point everyone knows — and it works.

CAUTIONS

Avoid deep perpendicular needling — the median nerve runs between the two tendons. Needle with care to avoid nerve injury. Generally safe; no major contraindications.

6. HT-7

Shén Mén — Spirit Gate

CHANNEL Heart (Hand Shaoyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Yuan-Source Point

Shu-Stream Point

Earth Point

Sedation Point of Heart Channel

LOCATION At the wrist joint, on the radial side of flexor carpi ulnaris, in the depression at the proximal border of the pisiform bone.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, excessive dreaming
- ▶ Anxiety, palpitations, panic, fright
- ▶ Mania, epilepsy, poor memory, muddled thinking
- ▶ Cardiac pain, chest pain, irregular heartbeat
- ▶ Night sweats (Heart Yin deficiency)

BOARD PEARL

HT-7 is the **#1 point for insomnia and calming the spirit (Shen)**. "Spirit Gate" — it literally opens and regulates the gate of the Shen. As the Yuan-Source point of the Heart, it accesses the Heart's fundamental Qi. As the Shu-Stream and Earth point, it treats heaviness and joint pain. The boards love asking: "Which point calms the Shen?" — HT-7 is almost always the answer.

MEMORY TRICK

"Spirit Gate opens the door to sleep." Can't sleep? Anxious mind? Gate the Spirit at HT-7. The Heart houses the Shen — guard the gate.

CAUTIONS

Avoid the ulnar artery which lies lateral to this point. Needle carefully — the area is sensitive. No major contraindications.

CHANNEL Lung (Hand Taiyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Luo-Connecting Point

Confluent Point — Ren Mai

Command Point — Head & Posterior Neck

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

LOCATION Superior to the styloid process of the radius, 1.5 cun above the transverse crease of the wrist, in the cleft between the tendons of brachioradialis and abductor pollicis longus.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Headache (especially occipital and vertex), stiff neck
- ▶ Cough, asthma, sore throat (releases the exterior, benefits the Lung)
- ▶ Facial paralysis, deviation of mouth (Bell's palsy)
- ▶ Urinary disorders via Ren Mai (opens and regulates the Conception Vessel)
- ▶ Wrist pain, weakness of the thumb (local indication)

BOARD PEARL

LU-7 holds **three major categories simultaneously** — Luo-Connecting, Confluent of Ren Mai, AND Command for Head/Neck. No other point holds this many high-yield designations. Paired with KD-6 (confluent of Yin Qiao Mai), they open Ren Mai and Yin Qiao Mai together — the classic pair for throat, chest, lung, and Yin deficiency conditions. The "Four Command Points" (LI-4, LU-7, ST-36, BL-40) are guaranteed board questions.

MEMORY TRICK

"Broken Sequence breaks the headache." LU-7 breaks the pattern of head and neck pain. Three titles, one point — the overachiever of acupuncture.

CAUTIONS

This point is needled obliquely (not perpendicularly) directed proximally, 0.3–0.5 cun. Transverse needling technique — boards may test correct needling direction.

8. KD-3

Tài Xī — Great Ravine

CHANNEL Kidney (Foot Shaoyin)

POINT CATEGORIES

Yuan-Source Point

Shu-Stream Point

Earth Point

Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star Point

LOCATION In the depression between the medial malleolus and the Achilles tendon, level with the prominence of the medial malleolus.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Low back pain, weakness of the knees (Kidney deficiency)
- ▶ Tinnitus, deafness, dizziness (Kidney Yin or Yang deficiency)
- ▶ Sore throat, toothache (Kidney Yin deficiency with empty fire rising)
- ▶ Impotence, seminal emission, infertility (Kidney Jing deficiency)
- ▶ Frequent urination, nocturia, enuresis (Kidney Yang deficiency)

BOARD PEARL

KD-3 is the **#1 point for tonifying the Kidneys** — both Yin and Yang. As the Yuan-Source point of the Kidney channel, it directly accesses Kidney Yuan Qi (original Qi). Because the Kidneys are the root of all Yin and Yang in the body, this single point can be used for virtually any deficiency pattern. Boards frequently test KD-3 in Kidney Yin deficiency presentations (night sweats, tinnitus, low back ache, malar flush).

MEMORY TRICK

"Great Ravine fills the deepest well." The Kidneys are the deepest organ — KD-3 goes to the source. Back pain + tinnitus = think Kidneys = think KD-3.

CAUTIONS

Avoid the posterior tibial artery which passes adjacent to this point. Palpate before needling. No major contraindications.

9. GB-20

Fēng Chí — Wind Pool

CHANNEL Gallbladder (Foot Shaoyang)

POINT CATEGORIES

Meeting Point — GB and Sanjiao (SJ) Channels

Meeting Point — GB and Yang Wei Mai

Window of Heaven Point (some traditions)

LOCATION Below the occipital bone, in the depression between the origins of sternocleidomastoid and trapezius muscles, level with DU-16 (Fēng Fǔ).

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Headache (especially occipital and temporal), migraine
- ▶ Common cold, stiff neck, Wind invasion (the "Wind Pool" dispels Wind)
- ▶ Dizziness, vertigo, hypertension (subdues Liver Yang, extinguishes Wind)
- ▶ Eye disorders — blurred vision, red and painful eyes, lacrimation
- ▶ Tinnitus, deafness, ear pain (Gallbladder channel circles the ear)

BOARD PEARL

GB-20 is the **#1 point for expelling Wind** — both external Wind (common cold, stiff neck) and internal Wind (tremor, dizziness, stroke). The name "Wind Pool" tells you everything — Wind collects here at the occiput. Together with GB-21 and DU-16, it forms the "Wind triangle." Its meeting with Yang Wei Mai makes it critical for exterior conditions. Boards love testing GB-20 for occipital headache + Wind invasion presentations.

MEMORY TRICK

"Wind pools at the base of the skull." Feel a cold coming on with a stiff neck? That's Wind collecting in the Wind Pool. GB-20 drains it.

CAUTIONS

CRITICAL: Do NOT needle deeply toward the opposite eye — risk of puncturing the medulla oblongata (brainstem). Safe depth: 0.5–1.2 cun directed toward the tip of the nose or the opposite eye. Boards test safe needling direction here.

10. DU-20

Bái Huì — Hundred Meetings

CHANNEL

Du Mai (Governing Vessel)

POINT CATEGORIES

Meeting Point — All Yang Channels

Sea of Marrow Point

Meeting of Du Mai with Liver Channel

Sun Si-miao Ghost Point

LOCATION

On the midline of the head, 5 cun posterior to the anterior hairline (or 7 cun above the posterior hairline), at the midpoint of the line connecting the apices of both ears.

TOP 5 CLINICAL INDICATIONS

- ▶ Headache (especially vertex headache — the hallmark indication)
- ▶ Dizziness, vertigo, tinnitus (raises Yang, benefits the brain)
- ▶ Prolapse — rectal, uterine, organ prolapse (raises sinking Qi)
- ▶ Mental disorders — poor memory, lack of concentration, mania, epilepsy
- ▶ Nasal obstruction, hemorrhoids (raises clear Yang to the head)

BOARD PEARL

DU-20 is the **#1 point for vertex headache and raising Yang Qi**. "Hundred Meetings" — because all Yang channels meet at the crown of the head. It has a powerful dual action: it raises sinking Qi (prolapse conditions) and subdues rising Yang (headache, dizziness). With moxa, it raises Qi; with needling, it can subdue Yang. Boards test DU-20 heavily for prolapse questions — if a patient has hemorrhoids or organ prolapse due to Spleen Qi sinking, DU-20 is the answer.

MEMORY TRICK

"Hundred Meetings at the crown — lifts everything up." Things falling down (prolapse)? Go to the top. Vertex headache? It's already there.

CAUTIONS

Needle transversely (subcutaneously), 0.3–0.5 cun — do NOT needle deeply on the vertex. Contraindicated in infants with an open fontanelle. Avoid in patients with uncontrolled hypertension when using moxa.

Point Category Quick Reference

Where these 10 points fit in the broader system

CATEGORY	POINTS IN THIS GUIDE	WHAT IT MEANS
Yuan-Source	LI-4, LV-3, HT-7, KD-3	Accesses the channel's original (Yuan) Qi from the Kidneys; treats the Zang-Fu organ directly
Shu-Stream	LV-3, HT-7, KD-3	Treats heaviness and joint pain (Yin channels); where Qi "pours" — good for intermittent conditions
He-Sea	ST-36	Treats Fu organ disorders (diarrhea, vomiting); where Qi enters deeply like a river joining the sea
Luo-Connecting	PC-6, LU-7	Connects Interior-Exterior paired channels; treats both the channel and its paired channel
Confluent (Eight Extraordinary)	PC-6 (Yin Wei Mai), LU-7 (Ren Mai)	Opens the Extraordinary Vessel; always used in specific master-coupled pairs
Command Points (Sì Zǒng Xué)	LI-4 (Face), ST-36 (Abdomen), LU-7 (Head/Neck)	Four empirical points that command major body regions. The 4th is BL-40 (Back/Low Back).
Group Luo (Meeting of 3 Yin)	SP-6	Where SP, LV, KD channels cross — treats all three organ systems simultaneously
Meeting Points (Hui)	GB-20 (GB + SJ; GB + Yang Wei Mai), DU-20 (All Yang)	Where specific channels intersect — combines the functions of both channels
Sea of Nourishment	ST-36	One of the "Four Seas" — governs nourishment of the entire body
Sea of Marrow	DU-20	One of the "Four Seas" — governs the brain (Sea of Marrow)
Ma Dan-yang Heavenly Star	LI-4, ST-36, LV-3, PC-6, LU-7, KD-3	Eleven empirical points selected by Ma Dan-yang for their exceptional clinical efficacy
Ghost Points (Sun Si-miao)	LI-4, ST-36, DU-20	Thirteen points for treating mental/psychiatric disorders (mania, epilepsy, "possession")

High-Yield Board Review

Quick-fire facts the examiners love

PREGNANCY CONTRAINDICATIONS (FROM THIS GUIDE)

Absolutely Contraindicated: LI-4, SP-6 — Both strongly promote labor and descend the fetus.

Use with Caution: LV-3 — Strong Qi- and Blood-moving action.

Board tip: If a question says "pregnant patient," immediately eliminate LI-4 and SP-6 from your answer choices.

THE FOUR COMMAND POINTS (SÌ ZǒNG XUÉ)

LI-4 — Face & Mouth | **LU-7** — Head & Posterior Neck

ST-36 — Abdomen | **BL-40** — Back & Low Back

"For the face and mouth, LI-4 is retained; for the head and neck, LU-7 is applied; for the abdomen, ST-36 is the best; for the back, seek BL-40."

THE FOUR GATES (SÌ GUĀN)

LI-4 bilateral + LV-3 bilateral — Powerfully moves Qi and Blood throughout the body. Treats pain, stress, emotional stagnation. The most commonly tested point combination.

EIGHT CONFLUENT POINT PAIRS (FROM THIS GUIDE)

PC-6 (Yin Wei Mai) pairs with **SP-4 (Chong Mai)** — Heart, chest, stomach

LU-7 (Ren Mai) pairs with **KD-6 (Yin Qiao Mai)** — Throat, chest, lung, Yin deficiency

NEEDLING DANGER ZONES (FROM THIS GUIDE)

GB-20: Never needle deeply — risk to medulla oblongata. Direct toward tip of nose.

DU-20: Transverse needling only — never deep perpendicular on the vertex.

PC-6: Median nerve runs between the tendons — needle with care.

PATTERN RECOGNITION SHORTCUTS

Liver Qi Stagnation → LV-3 (always first choice)

Spleen Qi Deficiency → ST-36 (tonify Qi and Blood)

Kidney Yin Deficiency → KD-3 (nourish the root)

Heart Blood/Yin Deficiency (Insomnia) → HT-7 (calm the Shen)

External Wind Invasion → GB-20 + LI-4 (expel Wind, release exterior)

Gynecological Disorder → SP-6 (always in the prescription)

Nausea/Vomiting → PC-6 (first choice, any cause)

Organ Prolapse → DU-20 (raise sinking Yang Qi)

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