

Ultimately preventative medicine

Chinese Medicine is a complete medical system that has diagnosed, treated and prevented illness for over two thousand years. It enhances the patient's recuperative power along with providing immunity. This is particularly important with the change of seasons, when we are often vulnerable to the illnesses associated with stress-related low immunity.

Herbal medicine is obviously a more natural method than synthetics, which, by comparison, are a fairly recent development of western medicine. Western pharmaceutical drugs typically capitalize on a single biologically active ingredient to produce a specific physiological effect. This accounts for their potency but also often for their secondary or side effects. Moreover, while synthetic drugs may control symptoms, they do not treat the underlying pathological process. For example, antibiotics eliminate a bacteria but do not improve a person's resistance to infection; diuretics rid excess fluid but they do not improve kidney function. With herbs, the active ingredients are enfolded within the whole plant, which tends to buffer their side effects. Chinese Herbs can be plant, mineral and animal substances that the body assimilates through our digestive, respiratory and cutaneous tissues. They work by reorganizing our body's constituents (Qi, Moisture, and Blood) within Organ networks and oust the adverse climate (Wind, Heat, Cold, Dryness, and Dampness).

These herbal formulas are many centuries old; they are indeed an art form, so refined is the balance of the functions of the different herbs as they work in harmony.

Chinese herbs address the underlying condition as defined by traditional diagnosis. Our herb formulas are blended to counteract any undesired effects and enhance the intended results. I try to tailor the formula to the individual as carefully as possible. These herbs are categorized according to their nature [warm, cool, or neutral], their taste [sour, bitter, sweet, bland, spicy, or salty], their configuration [shape, texture, moisture], their color, and by their properties: tonifying, consolidating, dispersing, and purging. (Properties represent the potential of an herb to produce particular results within the body.)

In my practice I use patent formulas made of ground up herbs which are easy to take and don't taste bad. There are rigorous quality control standards. Today we have substituted more common animal herbs for those herbs, which used to use, endangered animal parts. For example, the herb Long GU was ground up dragon bone, which was probably dinosaur bones from the fossil beds. These ancient creatures had already been dead for 30 million years. Today we still use fossilized bones or teeth... And how long has it been since you've seen a dragon?

TCM prevents the FLU

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) classifies all causes of disease into inside and outside factors, based on the Chinese understanding of the close relation between man and the influences of nature. When there is a weather change congruent with a deficiency of Genuine Qui, the individual's resistance might be too low to fight. Because Wind is "light and airy" it first affects the upper body. External Wind is characterized by its sudden onset and is often accompanied by fever. Sinusitis is caused by inflammation of the mucus membranes in the sinuses, the air-filled spaces in the bones of the face. Symptoms are a blocked up nose, a nasal tone in the speech, and sometimes a headache over one or both eyes, usually worse in the mornings, when lying down or bending forwards. Normally mucus is channeled through the tiny ducts to the nose, but during colds the ducts can become congested; and when the mucus builds up the sinuses become inflamed. In TCM we see this condition as mainly connected with a Lung Qi deficiency

Written by:

Dr. Fiona Kelley (a licensed acupuncturist and a Doctor of Oriental Medicine) Tel. 702-369-3406.

and with Damp Heat trapped inside the body. Acupuncture and herbs are the first line of defense. Peppermint, honeysuckle, tangerine peel, and chrysanthemum flower are all helpful herbs.

Winter is the time of year to move from ice cold drinks into warming teas to strengthen our Wei Qi, the outer protective layer of the body's defense. If you suffer from allergies, drink at least two cups a day of strong ginger and peppermint tea. If your throat is scratchy or sore and your eyes are watery, itchy or red, then modify by using two bags of peppermint tea to one bag of ginger tea. If your symptoms include more sneezing, a runny nose or headache, then double the amount of ginger tea bags; or you can just grate fresh ginger rhizome into hot water. Add some raw honey, it's delicious.

Overwork and stressful emotions along with abnormal patterns in diet such as skipping meals are all considered to be endogenous factors that can weaken our immune system. This is a good time of year to eat seasonal root vegetables like yams; try yellow and orange squashes and pumpkins. Fish is energetically cold, so if you eat fish you should cook it with warming herbs like ginger. And for all you performers, make sure after you've been sweating to wrap up your neck and head so you don't catch an Evil Wind. The best time to take a bath is right before bed, so you relax your muscles, tendons and joints to help you fall asleep easier. Common sense tells us that the way we live has a direct effect on our health.

QIGONG FOR WEIGHT LOSS

Western medicine views obesity as an accumulation of fat, whether since infancy or acquired by overeating. (And those Las Vegas buffets don't help!) We all know that in most cases the treatment consists of low-calorie, low-fat [boring] dietary therapy and a rigorous exercise program.

We cannot expect to lose 20 pounds overnight, but we can take some responsibility for what foods we put into our own mouths and gradually change our eating habits. The desire for change has an impact on every choice we make.

Maybe we cannot afford to spend \$700 on a gym membership, but we can take some initiative for a twenty-minute walk three times a week. It doesn't cost anything and you can get some fresh air. How long has it been since you took a walk? If you have a dog, get out of the house with him, he'll love you for it. It is also important to address our emotional health and balance as well as our physical health and balance. Need more motivation? And how long has it been since you took a walk with a friend? Instead of meeting at a restaurant and overeating, why not have a meaningful conversation while you enjoy some sunshine? In Chinese Medicine we emphasize gentle movements like qigong or tai chi, including thoughtful walking. There are even walking meditations to help you focus, to free up your mind so that you can think creatively away from stress. This centers us, allows us to be mindful of what we are doing. Exercise is a part of daily life, not some separate entity.

Traditional Chinese medicine has a contrasting view of obesity as a situation created by imbalance. Obesity is related to a person's age, constitution, inherited traits, diet, emotions and lifestyle, each element of which can be seen as an imbalance caused by either deficiency or excess. Too much intake of fatty food or alcohol can cause stagnation of food essence and fat, leading to the excess type of obesity. But it may also be that we need to invigorate and harmonize the Spleen to digest more effectively. One of the first things I suggest to my patients is a variety of foods they may not have considered.

Written by:

Dr. Fiona Kelley (a licensed acupuncturist and a Doctor of Oriental Medicine) Tel. 702-369-3406.

Like western medicine, TCM offers several types of therapies for weight reduction including herbal therapy, massage, acupuncture, and Qigong. Some are designed for use with the TCM practitioner while some you can do without assistance.

Qigong is a self-practice for health that, in the case of obesity, will improve the regulation of your mind, your respiration, and your figure. Here is a simple but highly effective respiration exercise for weight loss and well-being: Place your left hand on the chest and your right hand on the lower abdomen, and then begin to direct the energy. On inhalation, elevate the chest while pulling in the abdomen. On exhalation, plump up the abdomen (the higher the better). One inhalation and one exhalation is a unit. For weight reduction, practice this 40 to 60 times with an empty stomach before meals to reduce or eliminate hunger and fatigue. Research has shown that electro-acupuncture and ear acupuncture can benefit in regulating nerve and neurotransmitter mechanics by inhibiting appetite and decreasing food absorption, as well as accelerating metabolism and breaking down fat. So take a deep breath and feel better!

TAKE A PEACEFUL RETREAT FROM STRESS

Recently I attended a spiritual retreat in a very beautiful place in the woods and I can't imagine what took me so long. I was amazed to learn that many of the things I take seriously and think about constantly are just so much internal mental chatter. How often do we think to our self: "I'm not good enough... I have to work harder. " I had always thought that I was being humble, but at the retreat I began to see that this activity was all ego. I learned that meditation could shut off some of the voices in my head and considerably reduce stress. Stress, after all, is not a natural state. In our natural state, Chinese medicine tells us, we are free from fear and desire. We can relax and move from wuwei, which means moving with the natural flow of the river. Things don't require as much effort when we're in a relaxed state because we're not fighting ourselves.

Obviously you can go to the mountains or go to the lake but what about not having to go somewhere? What are the things that you do on a daily basis that you can make less stressful? Most people barely sit down to eat. We are in such a fast-paced culture that fast food has become a way of life. But what if you just set aside forty-five minutes to eat and have a cup of tea afterwards quietly, without the usual distractions such as television or a book? It doesn't have to be fancy food. To eat without television or reading can be very challenging. Recently I challenged a patient to sit down for her meals. To her amazement she realized she actually had conversations with her children at the table!

The truth is that much of our usual stress stems from fear and self-concerns and self-consciousness. Much of what we do is a way of trying to avoid confrontation with what worries us. Yet when we look more closely we realize it is not as big a problem as we thought. This realization can free you! Meditation gives us the opportunity to practice simply being with our selves-- with our own body and mind. Even if you can't sit still, you can do things (like driving or chores) in silence. Try just sitting still for ten minutes. Close your eyes--no fidgeting. Sitting still is a metaphor for being very relaxed and simultaneously alert. This is different from most people thinking of being relaxed as being the precursor for sleep. Twenty minutes before you get up and just before bedtime (start with ten and work up to twenty) relax during the yin time. The body needs this time to rebuild cells to dance another day.

Of course, for many of us the problem is not just recognizing that we need to relieve stress but remembering to do so. Find ways to remind yourself through out the day to take a break. Breathe deeply, have a glass of water, or look out the window. For those of you who spend a lot

Written by:

Dr. Fiona Kelley (a licensed acupuncturist and a Doctor of Oriental Medicine) Tel. 702-369-3406.

of time in front a computer screen, set your alarm to chime once or twice an hour to remind you to stretch.

Indulged yourself adequately in a nutritional sense?

First thing to consider is what time of day do you eat your feast? Earlier in the day is better, because in Chinese Medicine we consider the body's clock is divided into twelve two-hour increments, and after 7 p.m. the Qi does not travel through any Meridians that will have a primary effect on digestion; so if you eat later, you are bound to feel very sluggish. You don't want to sit down in a ravenous state, but why not have a little moderate exercise before you feast? This can help clear the stomach so that you feel you have some room. Next, after your big meal you can take a walk, but don't plan on any active sports. Your body will need time to digest.

Of course organic foods have fewer pesticides, which makes them healthier for you; try some free-range fowl. Keeps it simple so that you can taste the five natural flavors: salty, sour, bitter, sweet and spicy. Careful food combining can also make it easier to digest. Fruits should be eaten alone and not be mixed with any other foods. All vegetables can be eaten with grains and meats. You will find whole grains much easier to digest than processed breads. Go easy on the extra seasonings like gravy or sauces rich in fat; opt for simpler spices instead. Ideally herbs may be soaked overnight or a few hours before cooking; then save the soaking water and add it to the stock to enhance flavor. The more legumes and vegetables you use in a stock, the richer it will be. Also, if you are not a vegetarian, you might want to add chicken or beef bones from the butcher's. Bones are inexpensive and rich in marrow that nourishes our Blood and Essence. It's easier to add spices than to put in too much and have to take some away. Remember that cooking can either increase or decrease the flavor of some herbs, so stay conservative about their amounts. Taste everything but don't eat a full portion of each food that is offered. That's what leftovers are for. Spreading out the mealtime luxuriously will also make it easier on your digestive system; enjoy your company rather than focusing on consuming food.

Now, what about alcoholic drinks, before or during a meal? Alcohol consumption is not considered a bad thing in Chinese Medicine, but moderation in all things is the best practice. Wine can aid in digestion by breaking down fats, but we know that too much alcohol can allow you to eat past the point of feeling full and may increase the absorption of sugars.

And finally, caffeine or other stimulants will not help after a heavy meal; you are better off with a hot cup of digestive tea.