

Traditional Chinese Medicine and Emotional Health

Good health depends on the balance between the mind, emotions, physical body and environment. This theme is central to Chinese medical practice. It is believed that physical ailments can generate mental and emotional symptoms and conversely, mental and emotional ailments can generate physical symptoms. This symbiotic relationship between the physical and emotional aspects of the individual gives Chinese medical theory a unique understanding of the causes and treatments of mental and emotional health issues.

A brief overview of the Chinese medical model of emotional health

Specific emotions and aspects of the human psyche correspond to the organs within the body. This relationship further cements the notion of symbiotic physical and emotional health. By correlating the emotions and aspects of the psyche to the organs, the TCM practitioner can give you a holistic map of your symptoms.

The aspects of the psyche in Chinese Medicine

The psyche in Chinese medicine is divided into the following constituents.

- The Mind - thinking, memory, consciousness, insight, cognition, intelligence and coordination of the senses are all governed by the mind.
- The Ethereal Soul - this correlates to the western concept of the soul, as in this is the aspect of our psyche that it survives our body and leaves it when we die. It is not rational and is responsible for intuition, inspiration, life dreams and our relations with other people. The ethereal soul influences sleep and dreaming, our courage and ability to plan.
- The Corporeal Soul - the coordinating force of all physiological processes. It correlates to the reptilian brain, the primitive part of the brain that regulates breathing.
- The Intellect - generation of ideas, studying, concentration and focus are governed by the intellect.
- The Will-Power - long term memory, drive determination, enthusiasm and motivation are governed by the will power.

The relationship between aspects of the psyche, the emotions and the organs in Chinese Medicine

The mind is housed in the heart in Chinese medicine. The heart is affected by and related to all emotions.

The ethereal soul is housed in the liver. The liver is thought to be responsible for planning; the liver also regulates the smooth flow of qi throughout the body as well as the smooth flow of the emotions. Anger is the particular emotion that affects the liver energy making it stagnant. If we think of how we feel when we are angry we often experience this emotion as a force that wells within us waiting to burst out.

The corporeal soul is housed in the lungs. Again this can be thought of as the reptilian brain connection to breathing. Sadness and grief affect the lungs.

The intellect is housed in the spleen. The spleen is affected by worrying and pensiveness and can cause obsessive thoughts. It is related to nurturing and nourishment through our diet but also our childhood experiences.

The will-power is housed in the kidneys. The kidneys represent the constitution inherited at conception from our parents. They are the root of our essence (genetics, hormones, vigour). Looking within this context we can see how a person's drive and ambition is related to the kidneys. Fear is the emotion that most strongly affects the kidneys.

How Chinese Medicine treats mental-emotional symptoms

Emotions are expressions of qi - the energy that flows within our bodies. Emotions are simultaneously physical and spiritual. Acupuncture which taps into the body's energy can be a useful tool to treat mental and emotional symptoms as it recognises the physical nature of emotions. Simply taking the time out to lie down without distraction can enable a person to become calmer and encourage the smoother flow of emotional energy.

When we look at the distribution of acupuncture channels along the body we find that they correlate with many nervous and endocrine pathways. This allows acupuncture to regulate the signals given out by nervous and endocrine organs which play an important role in the experience and expression of emotions.

As TCM practitioners look at the individual's lifestyle, they can show you how to nurture and nourish your emotional health. By incorporating diet, exercise and relaxation practices you can gain greater balance.

Herbal Medicines also have an impact on physical and emotional function. They can be tailored to treat your constitution to provide calm, assist with sleep and reduce physical symptoms that may be associated with your condition. They do not have side effects and are not addictive like some conventional medications.

Specific disorders that respond well to Chinese Medicine

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress related insomnia
- Stress
- Pre-menstrual dysphoric disorder
- Panic attacks
- Attention deficit disorder and Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Post natal depression

Useful Links

- http://www.acupuncture.org.uk/content/Library/doc/anxiety_bp9.pdf
- <http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=27830>
- <http://www.alternativementalhealth.com/articles/chinesedepression.htm>
- <http://cwmh.wordpress.com/2005/02/14/acupuncture-for-depression-during-pregnancy/>
- <http://aim.bmj.com/content/25/1-2/1.short?rss=1&ssource=mfc>
- http://www.vitalitymagazine.com/tcm_acupuncture_for_anxiety_and_mood_disorders
- http://www.acupunctureresearch.org.uk/papers/FS6_depression.pdf

© Leah Buhajjar, 2010