

Good Digestion and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Proper diet and good digestion are fundamental to good health. This fact has been recognised by healing traditions around the world, including Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Unfortunately, with busy lifestyles, we tend to forget this important key to health.

An unhealthy digestive system can result in a wide variety of ailments including constipation, fatigue, bloating and abdominal pains. In more serious cases, it can manifest as Irritable Bowel Syndrome, gastric ulcers and other diseases. TCM can help prevent or resolve these conditions.



Assessing Your Condition

Your practitioner will begin the assessment by asking you detailed questions about your condition and the symptoms that you experience. Don't be surprised if questions unrelated to your ailment are also asked. TCM always looks at the whole person: your constitution, lifestyle – even the changes of the season – to arrive at the right treatment plan for you. Taking your pulse and examining your tongue, two special diagnostic techniques used in TCM, complete the intake.



Treating Digestive Problems

In TCM, the digestive system is described as a soup pot sitting on a fire. The soup pot cooks the food you eat into a nourishing broth from which the body extracts Qi and Blood.

TCM looks at health as a harmonious balance of mind and body with their surroundings. Illnesses arise when this balance is upset. When it comes to our digestive systems, what we eat and when we eat it are important factors in keeping the soup pot at a steady simmer.

Eating foods that are too cold can dampen the digestive fires, while foods that are too hot can cause the fire to blaze out of control. Heavy and rich foods can make the soup too thick and turbid, impairing the body's ability to make and distribute Qi and Blood.

When the digestive system becomes unbalanced, acupuncture or herbal prescriptions can cool down any excess heat, stoke a flagging fire or otherwise bring everything back into proper order.

For example, a large scale study done in 1991 treated 300 patients with ulcerative colitis using Chinese herbs. It found that almost 68% of the patients were cured, compared to 30% in the control group treated with the pharmaceutical Sulfasalazine'. Another study found that acupuncture treatments cured 84% of a group of patients

suffering from gastric ulcers, compared to a success rate of just over 60% of patients treated with pharmaceutical drugs. The study also found that recurrence rates after one year were one third lower in the group treated with acupuncture².

The United States' National Institutes of Health recognise acupuncture as effective in treating nausea and vomiting, especially postoperative and chemotherapy-related nausea³.



The Right Diet For You

The quality of the food eaten affects the quality of the Qi and Blood your body can create. Fresh, minimally processed and preferably organically grown foods are the best options.

Returning to the metaphor of the soup pot, it is easy to see why TCM favours lightly cooked meals that are easily digested and assimilated. Moderate amounts of protein and an emphasis on complex carbohydrates in the form of vegetables and whole grains are the basics for any healthy diet. At the same time, TCM suggests avoiding overly greasy foods, refined sugars, too much alcohol and eating while upset. The right diet will differ for each person, and your practitioner can help you find the right diet for your lifestyle.

1. Chen Zhishui, et al. Tonifying spleen qi formula to treat ulcerative colitis. Suchun J TCM, 1991. 20.

2. Zhang Chunrong. 57 cases of gastric ulcer treated with Sijunzi Tang and WeiYang San. Guangxi J TCM, 2000. 23(1): 14.

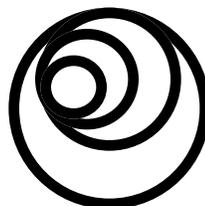
3. Acupuncture. NIH Consensus Statement Online, 1997 Nov 3-5. 15(5):1-34.

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Disclaimer

This factsheet is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.

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