

Weight Loss and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Counting calories and trying to shed pounds is practically a national pastime. Concern about our weight is about more than simple vanity. Higher body fat levels is associated with higher risks of cardiovascular diseases, many cancers and diabetes. Fad diets don't work and can actually inadvertently result in weight gain. Fortunately Traditional Chinese Medicine's principles of health can help you control your weight in a sensible and healthy manner.

② **Digestion According to Chinese Medicine**

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short), 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 your body extracts Qi and Blood.

If the wrong ingredients are put in the pot (for example, cold, sticky or greasy foods) the soup can become a gooey mess. This gooey mess is less nourishing and gets transformed into those extra unwanted pounds. You can also end up with a gooey mess if the cook making the soup is out of shape due to a lack of exercise. A lack of physical activity, according to TCM will result in a digestive system that's out of shape. Another way the soup making process can be ruined is by stress. In TCM, stress is like having too many cooks in the kitchen interfering with each other's work.

② **Controlling Weight with Chinese Medicine Principles**

When your digestive system is in need of a tune up, TCM can help bring everything back into order. For example, a study involving 342 clinically obese people found that one month of acupuncture treatments resulted in weight loss of between one and a half to two and three quarter pounds per week.¹

Laboratory research suggests that acupuncture can regulate the activity of the hypothalamus – the area of the brain that controls hunger – and can increase excitability of the brain's satiety centre, making you feel full earlier.²

One of the world's largest studies on nutrition and health found that obesity in rural China was far less prevalent than in the United States despite rural Chinese eating about 30% more calories.³ Higher activity levels as well as a much different diet made this surprising fact possible.

Further studies over an eight year period found that as income, activity levels and diet changed to become closer to the North American average, the prevalence of overweight men in China tripled.⁴ This finding illustrates just how diet and exercise, more than genetics, influences a person's weight.



Practical Tips

Proper diet and exercise are key to losing weight and keeping it off. In TCM, the emphasis is on a diet rich in whole grains and lightly cooked vegetables. Minimal amounts of saturated fats (for example beef and pork) and a higher use of complex carbohydrates (grains and vegetables) as well as plant source proteins, like soy, other beans, and nuts are the basics for this type of diet. Followed conscientiously, this kind of diet provides your body with a good source of fiber, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, flavonoids, and unsaturated fats.

The metaphor of the soup pot illustrates that too many raw or cold foods will hamper your digestion by cooling the soup. Also the image of too many cooks reminds us to slow down and minimize stress. Avoiding eating when upset and taking the time to enjoy your meals are beneficial for your digestion.

Regular moderate exercise is also essential to controlling weight. For weight loss to occur, our bodies need to burn more calories than we take in. Exercise will build muscle and boost metabolism rates, allowing our bodies to burn off those extra pounds. Also movement keeps the digestive tract stimulated and operating smoothly. Walking, swimming, yoga and taiji are all excellent exercise options to explore.

Weight loss is really about finding ways to optimize your lifestyle. As you make changes to your activity levels and diet, your overall state of health will improve and any excess weight will gradually disappear.

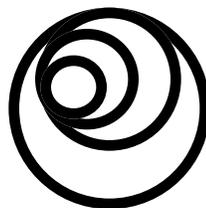
-
1. Hu Limei, et al. "Clinical observation of 342 cases of obesity treated with acupuncture". Jiangsu J TCM 1991. (1):18.
 2. Liu Zhicheng, et al. "Action of acupuncture on Ventromedial Nucleus of Hypothalamus in the rat model of obesity". J TCM. 2000. 41(1):25.
 3. Campbell TC, et al. China-Cornell-Oxford Study on Nutrition, Health and the Environment: online summary. www.nutrition.cornell.edu/ChinaProject.
 4. Popkin, Barry. "The nutrition transition and obesity in the developing world. J Nutr. 2001. 131:871S-873S.

I am indebted to my instructor, Kai Chen M.M., Ph.D. (Beijing) for summarizing the Chinese research used in this factsheet.

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.

© James Saper, 2005



James Saper R.TCM.P.
328 Woolwich Street
Guelph, ON N1H 3W5
(519) 341.9314
acupuncture@gto.net