

Chinese herbal medicines and the mind

In TCM, there are several herbs and combinations of herbs that exert a primary influence on the 'Spirit' (*shen*), while others have a supportive role due to their action on the organ systems and vital substances that are most closely associated with one's sense of emotional and mental well-being. This has led to the development, over the centuries, of specific herbal formulas that are frequently used in the clinic for patients who present with disturbances of the Spirit (*shen*).

Chinese herbal therapy is generally given over several months, depending on the individual condition. The aim is to restore health and harmony to the whole person, taking into account the direct influence of the mind on the body and the body on the mind. Clinical improvement may occur in as little as 2–3 days. However, in complex or long standing conditions, results may not be seen for several weeks, while the herbal medicines strengthen and harmonize the various organ systems, supporting normal functions.

It is always best to seek the help of a qualified Chinese medicine practitioner, who can best advise you on the most suitable treatment program and also supervise your progress.



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Support for your emotional balance with Chinese herbal medicine.



The Sun Herbal range of concentrated Chinese herbal formulas can help support your emotional balance effectively and naturally.

Our Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) brands include:

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Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) approach to the MIN

“... as you ought not to attempt to cure the eyes without the head, or the head without the body, so neither ought you to attempt to cure the body without the soul; and this is the reason why the cure of many diseases is unknown to the physicians of Hellas, because they are ignorant of the whole, which ought to be studied also; for the part can never be well unless the whole is well.”

(Plato, Charmides, transl. B. Jowett)

When Plato wrote the above criticism of the physicians of ancient Greece (circa 380BCE), he may well have been speaking about their modern Western counterparts, who still practice according to the ‘body-mind dualism’ that was popularised by Rene Descartes in the 17th century. This doctrine has also firmly entrenched the notion that the psyche is, for all intents and purposes, equivalent to the brain. Somehow the basic contradictions involved in this view have never been satisfactorily resolved.

The Chinese medical tradition, on the other hand, has always begun from an holistic perspective: body and mind; the individual and society; human beings and nature. These seemingly opposing pairs are seen to be complementary and inseparable. Moreover, when looking at the psyche, Chinese medicine does not restrict its location to any one single bodily organ. Each aspect of the mind (the ‘Spirit’ in TCM) is closely linked to each of the organ systems, as understood in TCM.

While an in depth discussion of these ideas is outside the scope of this brochure, their practical application allows TCM physicians to develop individualised treatments that balance and harmonise body and mind. Without resorting to labels, TCM doctors are able to link specific organ system imbalances with specific mental and emotional states and vice versa. A central tenet of TCM is that everything is changing, including mental as well as physical conditions. In addition, all changes proceed according to natural laws, embodied in the theories of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements (a.k.a. the Five Phases).

Thus, in TCM nothing is permanent, as all things are in a constant state of flux, moving in accordance with universal principles. Hence, there is no need to give a fixed label for a mental or physical condition, once it has been understood within the context of orderly change. From this

enlightened perspective, causes can be discovered and corrected, and movement along a destructive path can be diverted into a constructive process that leads to healing of the whole person.

Ancient chinese medical theories and mental health

Below is a chart that summarises some of the important relationships in TCM, according to the theory of the Five Elements (*wu xing*) – the five phases of orderly change.

Five Element Correspondences

Element	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Dynamic	Potential activity	Actual activity	Undifferentiated world of possibility	Potential result	Completion of activity
Yin-Yang	Young Yang	Mature Yang	Balance	Young Yin	Mature Yin
Development	germination	growth	ripening	harvest	storage, seed
Season	Spring	Summer	Late summer, monsoon	Autumn	Winter
Organ system	Liver - Gallbladder	Heart - Small Intestine	Spleen - Stomach	Lung - Large Intestine	Kidney - Bladder
Emotional quality	Self-assertion, righteous indignation	Joy, enthusiasm	Orderliness	Vitality	Will, drive
Pathological Emotion	Anger	Over - excitement	Obsession, worry	Sadness, grief	Fear, timidity
Human quality	Planning, decision making	Clarity of consciousness	Ideas, inspiration, understanding, focus of attention, working memory	Taking in, holding on & letting go	Long term memory, concentration
Sense organ	Eyes, vision	Tongue, speech	Mouth, taste	Nose, smell, touch	Ears, hearing
Fluid	Tears	Sweat	Watery saliva	Nasal mucus	Mucoid saliva
Sound (or tone of voice)	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning
Injured by excessive	Walking	Staring	Sitting	Lying	Standing
Flavour	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent (spicy)	Salty

While the left basic concepts and their practical application may be grasped within the course of a 4 – 5 years’ study program, together with mentoring by a senior TCM practitioner, it takes a lifetime practice to truly master them. The art of TCM lies in the appropriate interpretation of the underlying theories and their unique application to each individual patient.

TCM does not try to label a patient’s condition – it is seen from the perspective of dynamic change. Because each individual’s experience of distressing symptoms is unique, and the clinical features in each case are also unique, a disorder is understood within the context of the changing circumstances of a person’s physical and mental environments. The idea of a fixed disease or clinical entity is not part of TCM; while there may be common symptoms and patterns of symptoms, each individual is different in terms of constitution, environment, stage of development of a disorder and severity of the condition.