

Balancing emotions

➤ TCM approaches to emotional health and wellbeing

IN the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), our goal is to achieve harmony among bodily structure, vital energy and the spiritual essence or mind, collectively known as *Xing Qi Shen*. Our bodies are finely tuned to navigate life's challenges, operating optimally when these energies are balanced. However, imbalances in these opposing forces may signal potential illness.

Emotional health in TCM is closely tied to specific organs, which correspond to various emotional responses known as "the seven emotions". These emotions - joy, anger, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear and surprise - are intricately linked with the five viscera, creating a complex interplay between our emotional experiences and internal organ functions.

TCM shared each emotion closely corresponds with a specific organ and excessive or prolonged emotions can disrupt the smooth flow of *qi* and blood, potentially leading to imbalance and disease. It is important to view each organ as a functional entity, recognising its integral role in maintaining emotional equilibrium. Emotional assessments are essential aspects of TCM diagnosis, shedding light on how organ functions may influence emotional well-being. By exploring the interconnectedness of physical body, vital energy and emotional resilience, TCM seeks to promote harmony within the body-mind-spirit continuum.

Each organ corresponds to one of the five elements of fire, earth, wood, water and metal, with life energy or *qi* flowing between them. For example, the liver's role in TCM is deeply tied to emotions such as anger, frustration and resentment. Referred to as "the general of officials", the liver regulates emotions, stores blood and has a dispersing function that regulates *qi* circulation, promoting emotional stability.

According to the Five Elements theory, the liver belongs to the wood element and plays a crucial role in emotion regulation and blood storage. Excessive anger can cause *qi* and blood to rise, resulting in symptoms such as headache, dizziness, flushed face, tinnitus and fainting. Dysfunctions in the liver's



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dispersing function, due to emotions being suppressed, can lead to *qi* stagnation and emotional imbalances such as feelings of anger, irritability and resentment as well as physical symptoms such as digestive issues.

Similarly, other TCM concepts explore how excessive joy, overthinking, prolonged sorrow and extended fear affect *qi* flow and organ functions. The relationship between emotional health and organ imbalances is one of mutual influence and interaction, highlighting the holistic approach of TCM in addressing physical and emotional well-being.

Evidence behind TCM

A growing body of research sheds light on how TCM may alleviate symptoms commonly associated with anxiety and depression, including insomnia, fatigue and digestive issues. TCM can complement conventional treatment approaches, which typically involve counselling and standard pharmacological medications.

TCM offers a holistic approach that fosters enduring health and vitality beyond mere symptom relief for these challenges. It employs treatment modalities such as herbal medicine, acupuncture and massage therapy to rebalance the flow of *qi* and blood within the body and harmonise the functions of internal organs. In this way, TCM aims to address the root causes of emotional distress,

facilitating a return to a state of balanced physical and mental health. For example, sour jujube seed calms the mind and nourishes the heart, which is useful for insomnia, anxiety and emotional instability, while licorice, an adaptogenic herb, helps regulate the body's stress response and promotes inner calm.

The findings thus far are promising. Researchers have found acupuncture has a positive impact on patients with depression, relieving symptoms alongside pharmaceutical therapies such as antidepressants. Another study found acupuncture helped reduce anxiety and improve quality of life among women with eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia.

These examples pave the way for a deeper synergy between TCM and conventional medicine. Ongoing researches seek to integrate TCM into broader therapeutic contexts, fostering collaboration with other treatment modalities.

Any decision regarding the incorporation of TCM into your treatment plan should be made after thorough consultation with your doctor and a TCM practitioner. To learn more, see a registered TCM practitioner.

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SUMMARIES

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