

Coping With Stress Using Chinese Traditional Medicine

TAKE CONTROL OF STRESS BEFORE IT TAKES CONTROL OF YOU (Part 2)

Last month we covered the definition of stress, our physical response to it, and how it negatively impacts our health. In this issue we will discuss specific methods to cope with stress using TCM and Solution-focused therapy.

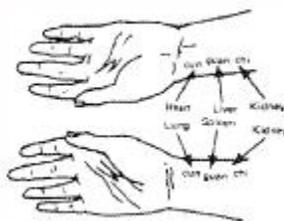
Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the second largest medical system and the oldest professional, continuously practiced medicine in the world at over 3000 years old. TCM is a holistic medicine, meaning that it considers the whole person - body, mind, and spirit - and incorporates nature into its diagnosis and treatment. It is based on ancient Chinese concepts of Yin and Yang, opposing energies that transform into and balance each other. Sun is Yang energy and with it we have light. The sun sets, and with the darkness we can see the moon which is Yin energy. Another essential concept of TCM is "Qi" (pronounced "chi"), most loosely translated as "energy". Acupuncture, herbal medicine, tui na massage, food cures, tai chi and qi gong are all part of TCM's treatment repertoire. They can be applied singly or collectively.

As we are all different from each other, there is no one thing that will help us all. However, there are some basic tenets that can be applied. Tai chi and qi gong are Chinese martial arts that employ precise flowing movements that help to regulate the breathing and heartbeat as well as stretch the muscles and build energy. The movements are meditative and relaxing and can be performed by people of all ages and ability.

Food is another powerful, yet inexpensive medicine. When the body is under stress, it can be like an overheated engine, so it is best to avoid spicy hot foods. Greasy, heavy, fatty, and sugary foods are also hard to digest. Ideally, one would eat according to the season and climate, and according to one's body condition. So, if you tend to be cold and/or it is winter, warming soups are ideal and cold, raw foods should be avoided.

If you are usually hot and/or it is summertime, try eating more fresh fruit and vegetables. Think about the foods you are eating. Does the energy of the food seem warming or cooling (aside from the physical temperature, e.g. tofu is cold in energy even if it is cooked)? What is the flavour? Do you tend to over/under-eat one flavour (salty, sweet, sour, spicy, bitter)?

Are you getting enough sleep at night? Remember nighttime is when Yin energy is strongest, and Yin energy is also more relaxed and storing than Yang energy, which is excited and moving.



Acupressure is another easily employed method for coping with stress. While a diagnosis is essential for determining the best points for the individual, there are some general points and areas that can provide some relief. Tension is commonly held in the neck and shoulders, so massaging those areas is always beneficial. The most tender points are often located where the shoulder straps to a backpack would sit. Does your jaw hurt?

Locate the acupressure points by clenching your jaw and pressing into the muscle there that pops out. Now relax your jaw and massage those points as well as the area in front of your ears. Tension headache? Massage your temples, stroke over your eyebrows from the centre outward, massage the tender spot in the depression at the back

of your head between the muscles where your skull meets your neck, and knead the tender fleshy part on the back of your hand between your index finger and thumb. Heart racing? Press on the point in the centre of your chest about level with the nipples and breath deeply. Or press the points on the inside of each arm, between the tendons, about 3 finger widths up from the crease of your wrist (also good for nausea and hiccups). Most of all, listen to the messages that your body is sending you and start to treat yourself well.

Listening to the messages our bodies are sending us can provide us with important insights as to what we truly want and need. Solution focused therapy helps you to assess where you are now, where you would like to be, and what course you need to set to get there. The body, mind, and its spirit do not understand negatives; they only want positive outcomes for us. The body is in a constant state of renewal and change. It is constantly fighting off invading organisms and survival, comfort and happiness are the only things the body understands. When we are hungry we eat, when we are tired we sleep. However, some of our bodies' signals are not as easily understood. What do we do when we are stressed? Sometimes we hope it will pass and try to avoid it. We often create or worsen stress by the things we say to ourselves.

If we are to move away from the harmful effects of stress, then we need to learn what that stress is trying to tell us. How do we do this? The answer is to ask yourself what positive outcome your stress wants for you. For example, if you discover that you are stressed because you want more control in your life, then the questions you would ask yourself are as follows. How specifically might I get it? How would I know when I have what I want (What would I see, hear, and feel)? What are some of the situations that may stop me from getting the things that I want, and what then might my solution be? And finally, how will having what I want affect all areas of my life?

Once you have discovered that stress is not an enemy to be feared and avoided, but rather a friend with a profound message to embrace, your whole idea of stress will have changed to a more beneficial one.

Written by Dr. Melissa Carr DTCM in collaboration with Sean Wilkinson R.P.C.C., both practitioners at the West Broadway Wellness Center.

If you have any questions or require more information on the traditional Chinese medicine approach to dealing with stress, you can contact Dr. Melissa Carr at (604) 783-2846, email Melissa@activetcm.com or Sean Wilkinson at (604) 908-8701, email seanwil@hotmail.com