

Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Traditional Chinese medicine is an ancient practice that is used by millions of people all over the world, even after the development of modern scientific medicine. At the root of traditional Chinese medicine is the belief that the individual person is viewed as an integral part of the forces of nature. By careful observation of nature, Taoist sages were able to perceive patterns common to both the external environment and the internal climate of the human body. Over a period of thousands of years, the cumulative observations of scholars and practitioners all over China led to an intricate system of diagnosis and healing.

The history of traditional Chinese medicine can be traced through archaeological excavations extending back millions of years. Primitive people spent most of their time on basic survival: hunting, locating and preparing plants for food, building shelters, and defending themselves. It's easy to imagine that over time, they'd have sampled most of the local plants in their search for food. In time, an oral record evolved that identified those plants that made good food, those that were useful for building, those that had an effect on illness, and those that were poisonous. Through trial and error, a primitive form of herbal medicine and dietary therapy was taking shape in China.

Fire also played a central role in their lives as a source of warmth, fuel, and light. As they huddled around fires, it was only natural that our ancestors would discover the healing powers of heat. Those powers would have been especially evident for cold, damp ailments such as arthritis, for which heat provides immediate relief. This was the origin of the art of moxibustion, the therapeutic application of heat to treat a wide variety of conditions.

These ancient people must have experienced a variety of injuries during their rugged lives. A natural reaction to pain is to rub or press on the affected area. This hands-on therapy gradually evolved into a system of therapeutic manipulation. People discovered that pressing on certain points on the body had wide-ranging effects. They began to use pieces of sharpened bone or stone to enhance the sensation, and acupuncture was born. As Chinese society developed a written history, documenting the powers of medicine moved from an oral to a written system.

Yin and Yang Theory

Yin and yang were first conceived through careful observation of the forces of nature. The Taoists who developed the system of traditional Chinese medicine saw the universe as a unified field, constantly moving and changing while maintaining its oneness. This constant state of change was explained through the theory of yin and

yang, which appeared in written form around 700 B.C. in the Yi Jing ("Book of Changes").

According to the theory, nature expresses itself in an endless cycle of polar opposites such as day and night, moisture and dryness, heat and cold, and activity and rest. Yin phenomena are those that exhibit the nurturing qualities of darkness, rest, moisture, cold, and structure. Its Chinese character depicts the shady side of a hill. Yang phenomena have qualities of energy such as light, activity, dryness, heat, and function. Its Chinese character represents the sunny side of a hill.

Everything in nature exhibits varying combinations of both yin and yang. For example, the morning fog (yin) is dissipated by the heat of the sun (yang); the forest fire (yang) is extinguished by the rainstorm (yin); the darkness of night (yin) is replaced by the light of day (yang). Any phenomenon within nature can be understood in relation to another; one will always be yin or yang in comparison with the other.

Basic Principles of Yin and Yang

Everything in nature can be expressed as the opposition of yin and yang. This is the energizing force of all aspects of nature. It is dynamic and the basic foundation for change in nature. Yin and yang are also relative terms: A forest fire is more yang than a campfire; a campfire is more yang than a spark. Nothing is purely yin or yang; it is always a matter of comparison.

Yin and yang are interdependent. Even though yin and yang are opposites, one has no meaning without the other. For example, day would have no meaning without night; heat cannot be understood without knowing what cold feels like; fever and chills can't be determined without experiencing the normal body temperature.

Yin creates yang; yang creates yin. Numerous examples of this principle can be seen in nature. For example, on a hot summer day (yang), there is a sudden thunderstorm (yin). A person may get symptoms of chills and a runny nose (yin) that turn into a fever with a sore throat (yang). A hyperactive child runs around frantically (yang), then suddenly falls asleep (yin).

Yin and yang mutually control each other. This is the basic mechanism of balance in nature and the human body. When the body gets overheated from exercise, the pores open and sweating lowers the temperature. When the body gets too cold due to exposure, the muscles shiver to generate heat.

Yin and Yang in the Human Body

Since the Taoists believe that everything is part of the oneness of the universe, they make no distinction between the external forces of nature and the internal processes

of the human body, believing that "the macrocosm exists within the microcosm." In other words, any process or change that can be witnessed in nature can also be seen in the body. For example, a person who eats cold food (yin) on a cold, damp day (yin) may experience excessive mucus (yin). Similarly, a person who performs strenuous activity (yang) on a hot day (yang) might experience dehydration with a fever (yang). Some of the traditional diagnoses sound like weather reports, such as "wind and cold with dampness" (a yin condition) or a "deficiency of moisture leading to fire" (a yang pattern). These diagnostic descriptions illustrate the principle that the body experiences the same fluctuations of yin and yang as the environment. The internal organs also have their own balance of yin and yang.

Yin functions tend to be nourishing, cooling, building, and relaxing and relate to the structure, or substance, of the organs. Yang qualities tend to be energizing, warming, consuming, and stimulating and relate to the functional activity of the organs. For example, the kidneys are considered the source of yin (water) and yang (fire, or metabolism) for the entire body. If the kidney yin is deficient or depleted, a person can experience hot flashes and night sweats, as occurs in menopause when estrogen (yin) levels decline. This is due to insufficient moisture (yin) to keep the metabolic fire (yang), which keeps the body warm, under control. Think of running a car engine with insufficient oil; the engine will overheat due to a deficiency of this yin-like lubricant. A deficiency of kidney yang produces such symptoms as cold hands and feet and a general lack of vitality. These symptoms, which often occur with age, are due to insufficient metabolic fire (yang) to infuse the entire body with energy and warmth, dispersing cold and fatigue (yin).

Yin and Yang in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese medicine applies this ancient theory of yin and yang in clinical practice. In the case of kidney yin deficiency, the therapeutic principle is to nourish the kidney yin and sedate the hyperactive yang. This is achieved with a classic formula known as "Rehmannia Teapills" which contain three herbs that nourish the kidneys' yin and three herbs that clear the heat that arises from the lack of the cooling and moistening yin functions. In kidney yang deficiency, similar herbs are used to nourish the kidney, with the addition of warming metabolic stimulants such as Aconite root and cinnamon bark.

Since all the organs have similar yin and yang aspects, it is possible to monitor and adjust the yin and yang levels of all parts of the body, maintaining a high level of vitality and preventing disease. This is achieved not only with herbs but with changes in diet and lifestyle. In this way, the ancient observations of the Taoists have practical applications in our own quest for wellness.

The Vital Substances

In traditional Chinese medicine, the body and mind are inseparable. Composed of a number of vital substances -- qi (pronounced chee), blood, essence, and body fluids -- the body and mind express their qualities through the functions of the internal organs. Ranging from tangible, visible substances to subtle, intangible forces, these basic elements of the body and mind are responsible for all aspects of human life -- physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Their intimate involvement in human activity makes them an essential part of physiology, and recognition and understanding of them are an essential part of diagnosis.

Qi

Although qi plays a central role in traditional Chinese medicine, it is extremely difficult to define. It is best to understand it in terms of its functions and activities, where it is more readily perceived. Situated somewhere between matter and energy, qi has the qualities of both. It has substance without structure, and it possesses energy qualities but can't be measured. It is the fundamental power underlying all the activities of nature as well as the vital life force of the human body. For example, the force of a thunderstorm can be understood in terms of its qi: The power of qi can be observed in the fallen trees and buildings in the storm's aftermath. Similarly, the strength of the digestive organs can be determined in relation to their qi by evaluating the appetite, color of the tongue, strength of the pulse, and the body's response to nutrition.

Blood

Blood has some parallels to its Western counterpart, such as its function of circulating through the body and nourishing the organs. However, it also has some very subtle functions in TCM, such as providing a substantial foundation for the mind and lending sensitivity to the sensory organs. It is closely aligned with Qi, having a complementary relationship with it. There is a saying, "Blood is the mother of Qi, and Qi is the leader of Blood." This refers to the fact that without Blood, there is no fundamental nutritional basis for Qi; without Qi, there would be no ability to form or circulate Blood, and it would fail to stay within the vessels. The two are also considered to flow together through the body.

Blood's main function is to circulate throughout the body, providing nourishment and moisture to the organs, skin, muscles, and tendons. If it is deficient, there can be symptoms such as dry skin and hair, inflexible tendons, and various emotional and reproductive imbalances, depending on which organs are involved. If it is stagnant, there will be symptoms of sharp pain at the site of stagnation. If there is heat in the

Blood, there can be irritability and skin rashes. Since Qi and Blood are so closely related, a deficiency or stagnation of one of the substances will often lead to the same imbalance in the other one.

The organs having the most intimate relationship with Blood are the Spleen, Heart, and Liver. The Spleen is in charge of creating Qi and Blood from food; it also functions to keep Blood within the vessels. When Spleen Qi is deficient, Blood deficiency or bleeding disorders can occur. The Heart is said to “rule the Blood and vessels”. When it is Qi or Yang deficient, there is insufficient energy to move Blood through the vessels, resulting in poor circulation and feelings of coldness in the extremities. Since the Heart Blood is also the resting place for the mind and spirit, deficient Heart Blood leads to symptoms of insomnia, palpitations, restlessness, and poor memory. Herbs that nourish Heart Blood often will quickly relieve these symptoms. Finally, the Liver is in charge of storing the Blood during times of rest or sleep. In addition to being a process of regeneration, this function is also intimately involved with menstrual flow and fertility. A deficiency of Liver Blood can lead to scanty menstruation or infertility. Stagnant Liver Blood may lead to menstrual cramping and discomfort. Since the Liver opens into the eyes, this deficiency can also manifest as blurry vision, floaters, and dry eyes.

Body Fluids

Body Fluids refer to all the fluids normally seen in the body, such as sweat, tears, saliva, and various secretions and lubricants. They are considered a by-product of digestion, so the Spleen and Stomach regulate their formation, while the intestines and Bladder are involved in their excretion. The Lungs regulate them from above, and the Kidneys are in charge of their metabolism throughout the body. There are two basic types: clear thin fluids known as Jin, and thick viscous fluids known as Ye. Jin is distributed mostly to the muscles and skin, keeping them moist and nourished. Ye acts as a lubricant to the joints and nourishes the Brain. Together, they are referred to as Jin Ye, the collective term for all the Body Fluids.

Sweat is ruled by the Heart. When it is excessive during the day, it is considered to be a sign of Yang deficiency; night sweats are a sign of Yin deficiency. For this reason, a TCM practitioner will always ask a patient about sweating patterns during the intake interview. Tears relate to the Liver; dry eyes are a sign of Liver Yin deficiency. Sputum is ruled by the Spleen; excessive sputum is a symptom of dampness (Yin excess) in the Spleen. The Lung is the storage area for mucus; a runny nose or wet cough is a sign of dampness in the Lungs. Since the Kidney is in charge of the moisture of the entire body, a dry mouth can indicate Kidney Yin deficiency. Because of the intimate relationship between the Organs and Body Fluids, a wealth of information about Organ function can be extrapolated from the condition of the Jin Ye. For this

reason, the intake interview includes questions about thirst, urination, color of fluids, and the amount and timing of sweating.

The Body Fluids also have an intimate relationship with Qi. Since Qi is involved in the transformation of fluids, deficient Qi can lead to fluid retention or excessive sweating. Conversely, fluid stagnation can impair Qi circulation, and profuse loss of Body Fluid can lead to a severe deficiency of Qi. For this reason, herbs that induce sweating are used cautiously in people who are Qi deficient.

Essence and Spirit (Jing and Shen)

Essence (Jing) is the subtle substance stored in the Kidneys that is responsible for growth, development, and reproduction. Pre-natal Essence is inherited from the parents, and it is the original substance of life. It cannot be increased, but it can be conserved through a healthy lifestyle of moderation. It can be supplemented by Post-natal Essence, which is derived from nutrition. When Essence is strong, a child will grow and develop normally, and there will be fertility, healthy brain function and strong immunity. In children, birth defects and failure to thrive are considered signs of Essence deficiency. In adults, it can manifest as infertility, low immunity, and premature aging.

Spirit (Shen) is the innate vitality of a person. It can be considered to be similar to the concept of the soul, but it also has a material aspect. When a person has healthy Shen, their eyes have the glow of life and their mind is clear. Since the Heart is the resting place for Spirit, disturbances in Shen are typically diagnosed as Heart imbalances. A mild Shen syndrome would be Heart Blood deficiency, where there are signs of forgetfulness, insomnia, fatigue and restlessness. In “Heat Phlegm Confusing the Heart”, a person could be violent, with a red face and eyes; this might have a Western diagnosis of psychosis. A person who is in a coma due to stroke or who suffers from epileptic seizures could be diagnosed with the Shen disturbance known as “Phlegm Blocking the Heart Opening.”

The Yin Organs (Zang)

In traditional Chinese medicine, the yin organs produce, transform, and store qi, blood, bodily fluids, and essence. The five yin organs are the lungs, spleen, heart, liver, and kidneys. The pericardium is sometimes considered a sixth yin organ. Instead of using surgical approaches, the Taoists developed their understanding of human physiology based on careful observations of how the body functions. For this reason, Chinese medical theory tends to focus more on the relationship of one organ to another.

The Lungs (Fei)

The lungs "open to" the nose: when the lungs are healthy, the sense of smell is acute, and the nasal passages remain open. While this approach has some analogues to the Western understanding of internal organs, it is important to view the Eastern tradition on its own terms. The lungs are considered the "tender organ" in traditional Chinese medicine because they open directly to the external environment and are usually the first internal organ attacked by external pathogens (disease-causing organisms) such as bacteria or viruses. Symptoms of imbalance in the lungs include cough, asthma, phlegm, chest pain, bloating, loss of voice, and nosebleeds.

The lungs control breathing. This important function closely parallels the Western understanding of the organ. In addition to controlling inhalation of oxygen and exhalation of carbon dioxide, the lungs -- along with the spleen -- are seen as the source of postnatal qi, the actual vitality of a person. (The kidneys are considered the source of prenatal qi, the constitution.) The concept of postnatal qi is important because people with a weak constitution don't have to be consigned to a lifetime of fatigue or illness. Through breathing exercises such as qi gong, a person can enhance his or her vitality through the qi of the lungs. The lungs control the qi of the entire body. Since the lungs transform inhaled air into qi, they have an important influence on the functional activities of the entire body. When lung qi is strong, breathing is normal and the body has sufficient energy. Weak lung qi, on the other hand, deprives the other organs and body tissues of energy, leading to shortness of breath, weak voice, and general fatigue.

The lungs control body fluids in the lower part of the body. An organ of the upper body, the lungs assist in moving qi and body fluids to the lower portion of the body. When this descending action of the lungs is impaired and normal qi flow is disrupted, cough and shortness of breath may occur. Also, fluids can collect in the upper body, resulting in edema (severe water retention) and difficulty in urination. If this concept is difficult to understand from a Western anatomic perspective, think of it from an energetic perspective. For example, when you dip a drinking straw into water, the straw fills with water. The water then flows out of the straw when you lift the straw out of the water. However, if you place a finger over the end of the straw before you lift it out of the water, the water remains in the straw until you lift your finger. This action is similar to the blockage of downward water movement that results from impairment in lung function.

The lungs govern body hair and skin. This principle refers to the lungs' function of dispersing moisture to the skin, maintaining its suppleness and elasticity. The body hair and pores are also considered an integral part of the lungs' defensive system. They act as the boundary between the outer environment and the interior of the body, protecting the body from the external environment. The qi that flows just under the skin is called wei qi and is considered the body's immune system. When the wei qi is strong, the body is able to fight off external pathogens. Clinically, the

relationship between the lungs and the pores is seen in persons who frequently catch colds: they often complain that they have an aversion to wind, and they break into a sweat when they aren't feeling warm. These symptoms are due to an impairment of the lungs' control of the pores, resulting in the easy access to the body's interior by external pathogens.

The lungs open to the nose and control the voice. When lung qi is healthy, the sense of smell is acute, the nasal passages remain open, and the voice is strong. When lung qi experiences dysfunction, the person may experience symptoms of nasal congestion, excessive mucus, an impaired sense of smell, and a weak or hoarse voice. As most of us have experienced, a breakdown in energy throughout the body often follows these symptoms.

The Spleen (Pi)

The spleen, of all the organs in traditional Chinese medicine, bears the least resemblance to its Western counterpart. The latter deals primarily with production and destruction of red blood cells and storage of blood. In traditional Chinese physiology, the spleen plays a central part in the health and vitality of the body, taking a lead role in the assimilation of nutrients and maintenance of physical strength. It turns digested food from the stomach into usable nutrients and qi. Entire schools of medicine were formed around this organ; the premise was that all aspects of vitality depend on the entire body receiving proper nutrition from the healthy functioning of this essential organ. Symptoms of imbalance in the spleen include a lack of appetite, muscular atrophy (wasting), indigestion, abdominal fullness, bloating, jaundice, and inappropriate bleeding or bruising.

The spleen governs transformation and transportation. Once the stomach breaks down and digests food, the spleen transforms it into usable nutrition and qi, then transports this food essence to the other organs. The spleen plays an essential role in the production of blood as well. For this reason, fatigue (qi deficiency) and anemia (blood deficiency) are often attributed to a breakdown in the spleen's ability to transform food into qi and blood. In addition to its role in nutrition and blood production, the spleen is also responsible for the "transformation of fluids": It assists in water metabolism, helping the body rid itself of excess fluid and moistening the areas that need it, such as the joints. If this function is disrupted, fluid disorders such as edema (severe water retention) or excessive phlegm can develop.

The spleen governs the blood. Considered the "foundation of postnatal existence," the spleen is the most important organ involved in the production of sufficient blood to maintain health. A highly nutritious diet appropriate to the individual's needs enhances the qi of the spleen, thus improving the person's energy level. These improvements are seen readily in clinical practice, where a sickly person can become

quite strong through tonifying herbs, dietary changes, and breathing exercises. Spleen qi is also specifically responsible for keeping blood within the vessels. A weakness in this function can lead to chronic bleeding, such as a tendency to bruise easily, or breakthrough bleeding in the middle of the menstrual cycle.

The spleen dominates the muscles and four limbs. Since the spleen is responsible for transforming food into qi and blood and transporting them throughout the body, proper functioning of the organ is essential to maintain muscle mass and strong limbs. A person with deficient spleen qi often experiences weakness and fatigue in the limbs. Exercise and a healthy diet benefit the body only if the spleen is able to transmit this nutrition and energy to the muscles.

The spleen opens into the mouth and lips. As the gateway to the digestive system, the mouth can indicate whether the spleen is functioning normally. If qi is normal, appetite is good, the lips are red and supple, and the sense of taste is sufficiently sensitive.

Spleen qi moves in an upward direction. All organs have a normal direction for their flow of qi. The flow of spleen qi keeps other organs in their proper place. If spleen qi is weak, then prolapse, or sagging, of the transverse colon, uterus, rectum, or stomach can result.

The spleen likes warmth and dislikes cold. Since the digestive enzymes require warmth to break down food properly, excessive consumption of cold foods and drinks can impair spleen function. Foods that are warming and easy to digest, such as soups with grated ginger, benefit spleen function.

The Heart (Xin)

The role of the heart, known in traditional Chinese physiology as the ruler of the other organs, has exceptional importance. Its function in traditional Chinese medicine parallels its Western anatomic function of pumping blood throughout the body to maintain life, but in the Eastern tradition it is also intimately involved with mental and emotional processes. Considered the residence of the mind and spirit, the heart is the organ most often involved in psychological imbalances. Properly nourished and balanced, the heart maintains our innate wisdom, contentment, and emotional balance. Symptoms of heart imbalance include palpitations, shortness of breath, sweating easily, mental restlessness, insomnia, forgetfulness, chest pain, tongue pain, and burning urine.

The heart controls the blood and blood vessels. When the heart is healthy, it pumps blood vigorously through the vessels to all parts of the body, nourishing the organs and maintaining vitality. A deficiency in this function can appear as pale complexion, cold hands and feet, palpitations, insomnia, and emotional disturbances.

The heart manifests on the face. When the heart is strong and possesses sufficient blood, the complexion is rosy, and the individual looks robust and healthy. When the heart blood is deficient, on the other hand, the person looks pale and unhealthy. If heart yang or qi is deficient, the complexion may appear bluish, especially in the lips. There may be palpitations or arrhythmias.

The heart houses the shen (spirit) and mind. This function encompasses the full range of human consciousness, including emotional health, mental function, memory, and spirituality. When the yin of the heart is deficient, a person can experience symptoms such as palpitations, anxiety, insomnia, and restlessness.

When the heart blood is deficient, poor memory, depression, and a tendency to be "spaced out" or "in the clouds" can result. The heart opens onto the tongue. In Chinese physiology, when an internal organ opens onto a sensory organ, it means the two organs are linked through structure, function, or physiology.

By examining the sensory organ, a practitioner can determine much about the health of the internal organ linked to it. The tongue (the organ of taste) can indicate health or imbalance in all the organs. A pale tongue can indicate heart blood deficiency, while a red tongue with no coating may indicate heart yin deficiency.

On another level, "the heart controls speech." Heart deficiency syndromes can lead to a withdrawn, quiet demeanor, for example. One patient who sought acupuncture treatment had experienced a complete loss of voice after a traumatic experience. While receiving strong acupuncture stimulation in a heart channel point on the wrist, the patient got angry and shouted, "Do you realize how much that hurts?" After apologizing to the patient for the unexpected discomfort, I reminded him that he had just spoken for the first time in a week! This sort of dramatic release of emotional trauma is quite common in acupuncture therapy, and it usually leads to a feeling of well-being afterward, as it did in this case.

The Liver (Gan)

The liver plays an important role in traditional Chinese physiology. Since it is in charge of the smooth flow of qi throughout the body, any disruption in its functions usually affects another organ. Stagnation of the flow of liver qi frequently disrupts emotional flow, producing feelings of frustration or anger. Conversely, these same emotions can lead to a dysfunction in the liver, resulting in an endless loop of cause and effect.

Associated with the storage of blood, the liver is also the primary organ involved in a woman's menstrual cycle. When the liver is out of balance, the following symptoms can occur: emotional problems, rib pain or fullness, dizziness, headache, cramping,

tendon problems, menstrual problems, jaundice, weak or blurry vision, and digestive disorders.

The liver stores the blood. The liver is considered a storage area for blood when blood is not being used for physical activity. These periods of rest contribute to the body's restorative processes. During exercise, the blood is released to nourish the tendons and muscles. This function is also intimately associated with the menstrual cycle; the liver maintains an adequate blood supply and regulates the timing and comfort of menstruation. Any dysfunctions in the menstrual cycle are almost always treated through the regulation of liver blood, qi, or yin.

When liver qi is stagnant (a very common condition), a person experiences irritability, tightness in the chest, and, in a woman, symptoms of premenstrual syndrome. When liver blood is deficient, symptoms such as dry eyes and skin, pallor, and lack of menstruation can occur. The liver ensures the smooth flow of qi. The Nei Jing refers to the liver as a general in the army, coordinating the movement of the troops. When the liver functions smoothly, physical and emotional activity throughout the body also runs smoothly. When the liver's ability to spread qi smoothly throughout the body is disrupted due to stress or lifestyle choices, however, the liver qi can become either stagnant or hyperactive, causing havoc in other organs, such as the lungs, stomach, and spleen. Often, stress-related problems such as irritable bowel syndrome or indigestion can be successfully treated by working through the "smoothing of liver qi."

The liver controls the tendons. As discussed previously, the liver stores blood during periods of rest and then releases it to the muscles and tendons in times of activity. When liver blood is deficient, tightness and inflexibility in the muscles and tendons can result. If liver qi is stagnant, muscles can go into spasm.

The liver opens into the eyes. Although all the organs have some connection to the health of the eyes, the liver is connected to proper eye function. Chronic eye problems can usually be traced to a deficiency of liver yin or blood, for example. It is quite common to resolve eye disorders successfully by treating the liver.

The liver shows on the nails. When liver blood is plentiful, it spreads to the farthest areas of the body, including the fingernails and toenails. When liver blood is deficient, on the other hand, the nails can appear pale, weak, and brittle.

The Kidneys (Shen)

The kidneys' function of regulating water metabolism in traditional Chinese medicine practice closely parallels their function in Western medicine, but their influence is much more far-reaching. They are the storage place for vital essence (jing), a subtle substance responsible for growth, development, reproduction, and fertility.

The kidneys are also considered the source of yin and yang for all the other organs, so a chronic disruption in their function can potentially affect any other part of the body.

The kidneys are the source of prenatal qi, which is inherited from the parents and interpreted as a person's innate constitution. Ultimately, the health and strength of the kidneys is the major determining factor in a person's long-term vitality and longevity. Symptoms of imbalance in the kidneys include low back pain, infertility, impotence or excessive sexual desire, urinary problems, tinnitus or deafness, edema, or asthma.

The kidneys store essence (jing). Jing, or essence, is a subtle substance that underlies all organic life processes. While it includes reproductive fluids, its scope goes far beyond this one area. There are two main types of essence: prenatal and postnatal. Prenatal essence is derived from the genetic material of the parents as well as the vitality of their lifestyle, habits, and nutrition. It is essentially a person's inherited constitution at birth. Postnatal essence, on the other hand, is within a person's control because it is derived from food and air. It is possible for a person who has a weak prenatal essence to lead a vital and healthy life through the maintenance of a strong postnatal essence. A healthy diet and lifestyle, along with exercise and breathing practices, such as qigong, are the means to achieving strong postnatal essence. In fact, a person with a weak constitution and a healthy lifestyle is usually better off than a person with a strong constitution and an unhealthy lifestyle.

The kidneys control water metabolism. The balance of yin and yang in the kidneys determines the efficiency of water metabolism in the body. When kidney yang or kidney qi are deficient, excessive urination or edema (swelling due to severe fluid retention) may occur.

The kidneys grasp the qi. While the lungs are the body's major organ of respiration, the kidneys provide the "grasping" force that is necessary for full inhalation. When kidney yang or kidney qi is deficient, therefore, a person may suffer a difficulty in inhalation, as is experienced by people with asthma.

The kidneys control the bones. According to Chinese physiology, the kidneys are also responsible for the development of strong bones. When the kidneys are deficient, a person may have brittle bones and, subsequently, repeated injuries.

The kidneys produce marrow and are connected to the brain. Marrow has a much broader function in traditional Chinese medicine than it has in Western medicine. In the latter, it is involved primarily in bone and blood-cell growth. In Chinese physiology, marrow is derived directly from essence, and it is the source of the substance that makes up the brain. Deficiencies in essence or marrow can appear in cases of cognitive decline.

The kidneys open into the ear. This function has great clinical significance: Hearing difficulties can often be treated by nourishing the kidneys. Babies are considered to have undeveloped hearing capacity due to the lack of maturation of kidney energy; elderly people tend to have ringing in the ears (tinnitus) or impaired hearing due to a depletion of their kidney qi over time.

The Pericardium (Xin Bao)

The pericardium provides a shield around the heart to protect it against external pathogenic factors. Sometimes considered a sixth yin organ, it otherwise has similar functions to the heart.

The Yang Organs (Fu)

The yang organs, or hollow (fu) organs, separate impure substances from food and drain them out of the body as waste. The six yang organs are the stomach, the small intestine, the large intestine, the urinary bladder, the gallbladder, and the "triple burner."

Chinese medical theory tends to focus on the relationship of one organ to another. Each yang organ is paired with a yin organ: the spleen and stomach, for instance, work together during the digestive process. While this approach has some analogues to the Western understanding of internal organs, it is important to view the Eastern tradition on its own terms. The stomach (wei), small intestine (xiao chang), and large intestine (da chang) all work together during the digestive process. Each of these yang organs is paired with a yin organ, and each is essential to good health and balance.

The Stomach (Wei)

The stomach is paired with the spleen. It is the beginning of the digestive process, and its functions act as a yang complement to the spleen's yin functions. Symptoms of stomach dysfunction include excessive or impaired appetite, nausea, vomiting, excessive or insufficient thirst, and mouth sores. The stomach is responsible for receiving and ripening food. The stomach functions as a cauldron to prepare food for the spleen's extraction of its essence. Considered the "middle burner" when paired with the spleen, its proper functioning is essential for health and vitality.

The stomach controls digestion of food and water. If the stomach is weak in its ability to prepare food for digestion, the spleen is unable to create sufficient qi and blood, resulting in weakness or impairment in other organs. The stomach also begins the process of "separating the pure from the impure." It sends the pure essence of food and fluids onward to the next yin organ for storage and transformation; the impure

waste is sent to the next yang organ to be further processed or eliminated from the body.

Stomach qi moves downward. When the stomach qi functions properly, it has a downward movement. After the stomach separates the pure essence and transfers it to the spleen, the partially digested food is sent downward to the small intestine for further processing. If this downward energy is disrupted, however, the stomach qi moves upward. Known as rebellious stomach qi, this upward movement produces symptoms of nausea, vomiting, belching, hiccups, and acid reflux.

The stomach likes moisture and dislikes dryness. Since the stomach is a yang organ, it tends to overheat when it is out of balance. Maintaining a moist atmosphere with sufficient fluids in the stomach helps to ward off stomach yin deficiency. This can be achieved by avoiding alcohol, excessive spices, and dry foods (such as popcorn, bread, crackers, and dried fruit) that are consumed without fluids.

The Small Intestine (Xiao Chang)

The small intestine is paired with the heart in a yin/yang relationship. Symptoms of imbalance in the small intestine are lower abdominal pain, bloating, indigestion, gas, diarrhea, dark, burning urine, or blood in the urine. The small intestine separates the clear and dirty aspects of food. After the stomach sends the pure essence of food to the spleen, it sends the rest of the food to the small intestine, where further processing takes place. The spleen once again receives the "clear" aspect of the digested food (the nutrients), while the "dirty" part (the waste) is sent down to the large intestine. After food has been further processed, any impure fluids remaining are sent to the kidneys and bladder, where they are excreted as urine.

The Large Intestine (Da Chang)

The large intestine continues the process of digestion: it receives waste, absorbs fluids, and excretes feces. It is paired with the lungs. Disorders of the large intestine can lead to constipation, diarrhea, or lower abdominal pain. The large intestine passes dirty qi and waste out of the body. After receiving the turbid material from the small intestine, the large intestine is the final stage of processing digested food. The final waste products of digestion are formed into stools and passed from the body.

The large intestine helps control body fluids. As the final stage of fluid metabolism, the large intestine absorbs water from the products of digestion while forming stools. A disruption in this function can lead to diarrhea (too much fluid) or constipation (insufficient fluid).

The Urinary Bladder (Pang Guang)

The urinary bladder's role is the same as it is in the West, storing urine and discharging it periodically. It is paired with the kidneys. Symptoms of bladder dysfunction include difficulty urinating, with burning, pain, urgency, bleeding, and retention. After receiving turbid fluids from the lungs, small intestine, and large intestine, the kidneys extract the last of the pure essence. The turbid remnants are then sent to the bladder, where they are stored until they are excreted from the body through urination.

The Gallbladder (Dan)

The gallbladder is paired with the liver; liver disharmonies often affect the gallbladder and vice versa. Disharmonies of the gallbladder can produce symptoms such as hypochondriac pain (pain below the ribs), anger, rash decisions, timidity, digestive problems, and emotional disturbances.

The gallbladder stores and secretes bile. The liver produces bile and the gallbladder stores it. When you eat fatty foods, the gallbladder contracts and pours bile into the small intestine to assist in digestion. Overconsumption of fatty foods can adversely affect the function of the liver and gallbladder.

The gallbladder rules decisions. An indecisive, timid person is said to have a weak gallbladder. A person who acts impulsively or out of anger, on the other hand, could be suffering from an excess yang condition in the gallbladder.

The Triple Burner (San Jiao)

The triple burner is not an organ per se, but rather it is a grouping of organs by function and location. The triple burner is paired with the pericardium in a yin/yang relationship. The primary function of the triple burner organs is water metabolism, and the organs are grouped as follows:

Upper Burner: Comprising the heart and lungs, the upper burner is described as a "fog" or "mist." It disperses the essence of food and qi throughout the body. Illness usually attacks this burner first, then it proceeds to the middle and lower burners.

Middle Burner: The spleen and stomach function together as the middle burner. Metabolism in this burner involves churning food and water into a digestible, soup-like consistency. Digestive disorders are often described as middle burner imbalances.

Lower Burner: The lower burner encompasses the organs below the navel: the intestines, kidneys, and bladder. It is considered a "swamp," since it is the sewage system of the body, excreting waste.

Disharmony and Diagnosis in Traditional Chinese Medicine

The concept of traditional Chinese medicine disharmony has evolved over the centuries into a sophisticated system of diagnosis. By following various established diagnostic procedures, a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine can construct a detailed picture of the status of all the internal organs without the aid of laboratory tests or other types of modern technology. To identify a pattern of disharmony, the physician will assess the status of the organs, gradually uncovering the cause of the disease by grouping the symptoms into traditional patterns.

Traditional Patterns of Disharmony

During the initial patient visit, the practitioner must organize all of the seemingly unrelated facts gathered about a patient's condition, gradually refining this information into diagnostic categories. At first, the practitioner organizes the evidence loosely into general categories known as the eight parameters, which consist of four groups of polarities: yin and yang, heat and cold, internal and external, excess and deficiency.

This eight-parameter diagnosis is the basic foundation for all diagnostic categories. It gives the practitioner a general overview of the patient's disease, or pattern of disharmony. Once the practitioner has grouped the symptoms according to the eight parameters, he or she can further refine the diagnosis to determine the condition of the vital substances and internal organs. In this way, the diagnosis evolves from a general image into a specific, clear description of the individual patient's physiologic processes. For example, in organ diagnosis, spleen qi deficiency is a pattern of disharmony. This is a very specific diagnosis. In eight-parameter diagnosis, the same imbalance is classified generally as a deficient internal condition. The eight parameters of disharmony form a system in which illnesses can be categorized. In traditional Chinese medicine, illness is seen as an imbalance, a lack of harmony in the body's systems, and knowledge of the eight parameters allows the practitioner to perceive the location, severity, and nature of the disease process.

This information is then applied to the other diagnostic categories of qi, blood, and internal organs, further narrowing and focusing the diagnosis. It is also important to remember that a physical condition is not fixed; inner processes are always subject to change. In other words, a yin condition can evolve into a yang condition; an exterior pattern can penetrate to the interior; a cold condition might turn to heat; and an excess disease often becomes one of deficiency. In a more complex disharmony, all eight patterns could occur simultaneously! For this reason, it is always a good idea to maintain an attitude of flexibility while perceiving the movements of nature. Any diagnostic pattern is simply a snapshot in time; an experienced practitioner

recognizes this and is always prepared to adjust the diagnosis and treatment plan to accommodate these changes.

External/Internal

In an external pattern, the pathogen fights with the body's defensive qi, or wei qi, which circulates under the skin. Symptoms of this struggle are chills, fever, sensitivity to wind or cold, body aches, sore throat, nasal congestion, and a floating pulse. If the cause of disease, known in traditional Chinese medicine as the pernicious influence, is not expelled, typically it penetrates into the interior. An interior, or internal, condition has more organ-related symptoms, such as diarrhea, stomachache, intestinal cramps, lung pain, bladder pain, constipation, and changes in the color of the tongue. A pathogen trapped between the interior and exterior exhibits such symptoms as alternating chills and fever, a bitter taste in the mouth, and a wiry pulse.

Heat/Cold

The possible causes of heat conditions are an external heat pernicious influence (for example, a virus that produces heat symptoms, such as a high fever), internal hyperactivity of yang functions (for example, drinking too much alcohol can cause a red face and headache), or insufficient yin. The yin aspect of the body includes the "lubricating and cooling" systems. When these systems are depleted, the body tends to overheat due to the deficiency of yin. In general, heat signs include redness in the face; feeling hot; thirst; colored secretions (such as yellow mucus or other discharges or dark urine); constipation; burning sensations; irritability; red tongue body with a yellow coating; and a rapid pulse.

Conversely, cold arises from external cold pernicious influences (for example, a virus that produces the cold symptoms of chills and a runny nose), an internal yang deficiency, or internal excess cold pathogenic factors. An internal yang deficiency produces such symptoms as always feeling cold, weak digestion, and low energy. A person who has acute symptoms of loose stools and abdominal pains from eating too much ice cream likely has an internal excess cold condition. General signs of cold are a pale face, feelings of cold, lack of thirst, clear secretions (pale urine, clear mucus or discharges), loose stools, muscle tightness, fatigue, pale tongue with a white coating, and a slow pulse.

Excess/Deficiency

A disease is classified as an excess condition or a deficient condition. Excess conditions occur when an external pernicious influence attacks the body and creates over-activity (for example, a high fever that is caused by infection with a virus); a body function becomes overactive (for example, redness and swelling that are caused by an infection); or an obstruction of qi or blood causes pain. Acute conditions tend to be conditions of excess. Deficient conditions arise due to an inherent weakness in the body or a weakness in the body's vital energy (qi), blood, yin, or yang. Symptoms of deficiency include weak movement, pale face, pale tongue, and weak pulse. Chronic conditions tend to be conditions of deficiency.

Yin/Yang

The most general of all the diagnostic categories, it can be considered a summary of all the others. Heat, excess, and external conditions are often yang conditions, while cold, deficiency, and internal conditions are often yin conditions. Most conditions include a mixture of yin and yang imbalances. In addition, each internal organ has its yin and yang aspects that must be balanced. For example, if heart yin is deficient, a person may experience insomnia, poor memory, and palpitations. If heart yang is depleted, poor circulation, pale face, purple lips, edema, and cold extremities can result. When yin, with its cooling function, is low, heat signs occur. When yang, with its heating function, is low, cold signs occur. Restoring the optimum yin/yang balance of each internal organ is the most important secret of maintaining health and vitality in traditional Chinese medicine.

Syndromes and Disorders of Qi, Blood, Yin, and Yang

This section covers syndromes and disorders of qi, blood, yin, and yang. Analyzing disease according to the eight parameters is essential in arriving at a diagnosis. However, it is only the first step; it usually does not provide enough information for a truly focused treatment plan. For example, a person might have chronic fatigue -- according to the eight parameters, chronic fatigue indicates an internal deficiency. The practitioner might recognize at this point that the person needs tonifying herbs to nourish and alleviate the deficiency, but which herbs? With further inquiry, the practitioner learns that the person also has loose stools and a poor appetite. Since these symptoms are related to the functions of spleen qi, the practitioner now knows that the syndrome is an internal deficiency of spleen qi. By combining the eight parameters with knowledge of the vital substances and the organs, the diagnosis is now detailed enough to make a focused treatment plan: tonify spleen qi. Tonifying herbs improve overall function of a particular organ and strengthen the entire organism when used long-term.

Remember that qi flows in a system of channels, called meridians, in the body, and each organ is linked to a meridian. Acupuncture can affect or manipulate qi to treat a specific imbalance. A practitioner might choose herbs that tonify spleen qi and use acupuncture or moxibustion (the application of heat) at acupuncture points that affect the spleen. For example, a point on the spleen meridian known as Spleen 6 can be activated to strengthen the spleen. Since the spleen and stomach meridians are directly connected, needling or applying moxibustion to a point on the stomach meridian also strengthens the spleen. In this way, a wide variety of treatment options are available to a practitioner once an accurate diagnosis is at hand.

Disorders of Qi

There are four disorders of qi: deficient qi, stagnant qi, sinking qi, and rebellious qi. When qi is deficient, the principal symptoms are fatigue, a bright pale face, a weak or soft voice, spontaneous sweating, a pale tongue, and a weak pulse. These general symptoms could occur in any type of qi deficiency. The treatment is to tonify qi.

Another type of qi imbalance is stagnant qi, an excess type of disharmony. Since health depends on the smooth flow of qi, stagnant qi can cause discomfort or pain almost anywhere in the body. It is typically associated with feelings of pain or distention that move from place to place, irritability, and menstrual irregularity. Premenstrual syndrome is a condition of stagnant qi in the liver. The treatment principle is to smooth the flow of qi through the affected organs or meridians.

In the disorder of sinking qi, a deficiency syndrome, the function of supporting the organs is impaired. Prolapse (sagging) of the bladder, rectum, transverse colon, or uterus occurs. Herbs that have an uplifting action, along with acupuncture and moxibustion, are used to treat this condition.

Finally, in patterns of rebellious qi, the flow of qi is the reverse of normal. For example, the normal direction of flow for stomach qi is downward. When rebellious stomach qi occurs, symptoms of nausea, vomiting, belching, or hiccups exist. The treatment principle is to return the flow of qi to normal, usually with herbs and acupuncture treatments. It is also necessary to rectify any underlying excess or deficiency that caused the problem.

Disorders of Blood

Three types of blood disorders can occur: deficiency, stagnation, and excess heat.

Blood deficiency syndrome is especially common among women due to their monthly loss of menstrual blood. It can also arise as a result of improper nutrition or spleen qi deficiency, which prevents full assimilation of nutrients. Symptoms include a dull pale

face, pale lips, pale tongue, dizziness, blurry vision, numbness or tingling of extremities, poor memory, dry skin and hair, scanty menses, and a thin pulse. The treatment principle is to nourish the blood with herbs, acupuncture, or moxibustion.

In blood stagnation, which is an excess pattern, the primary symptom is a fixed, stabbing pain, which can occur anywhere in the body as a result of injury, stagnation of qi or cold, or deficient blood conditions. Painful menstrual flow with clots may also occur. The treatment depends on the nature of the stagnation, but the common treatment principle is to activate or move the blood with herbs that stimulate circulation.

Acupuncture is especially effective in treating the pain resulting from the stagnation. With an excess condition of heat in the blood, symptoms of hemorrhage, skin rashes, itchiness, blood mixed in with bodily secretions, irritability, and sensations of heat can occur. Treatment includes using herbs that cool the blood along with hemostatic herbs to stop the bleeding.

Disorders of Yin

In disorders of yin deficiency, the cooling, moistening action of the body is depleted, leading to symptoms of reddish cheeks, red tongue with little or no coat, dry throat, heat in the "five palms" (palms, soles, and sternum; sometimes called "five hearts"), night sweats, irritability, and a thready, rapid pulse. The presence of additional symptoms depends on the organ system affected. The treatment principle is to tonify the yin and clear deficiency heat. In conditions of yin excess, there can be feelings of cold, mucus, and a general sluggishness. Treatment varies, depending on the particular type of excess yin, but it usually involves the use of warming herbs or diuretics.

Disorders of Yang

Yang deficiency is a chronic syndrome characterized by cold extremities, lack of sexual desire, infertility, an aversion to cold, pale face, tongue, and lips, and a slow, weak pulse. Other signs and symptoms depend on the particular organ systems affected. The treatment principle is to tonify the yang.

In yang excess disorders, signs and symptoms include headache, body aches, fever, sweating, thirst, red eyes, concentrated urine, constipation, mental restlessness, a red tongue with a yellow coating, and a full, rapid pulse. In this condition, the treatment principle is to clear excess heat.

Traditional Chinese Medicine: Causes of Illness

The causes of illness in traditional Chinese medicine are determined by a number of factors. Some of these causes are considered external, as in the six pernicious influences: wind, cold, heat, dryness, dampness, and summer heat. Other causes are considered internal, as in the seven emotions: anger, joy, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear, and shock. Other factors that play a role in the development of disease are diet, lifestyle, and accidents.

When the body is healthy, its various substances and energies are in harmonious balance, both internally and in relation to the external environment. When this innate vitality (true qi) and immune defenses (wei qi) are strong, it is difficult for externally contracted disease to gain a foothold, especially if the invading pathogen is weak. However, an exceptionally strong pathogen can overwhelm even a healthy person, especially if the person has been weakened by stress, fatigue, overwork, or other lifestyle factors. For example, a person with a strong immune system might avoid catching a cold, even if a sick person sneezes on him. However, if he drinks a test tube full of the same virus, his strong immune system will be no match for such an onslaught. On the other hand, a person with very weak wei qi can catch whatever pathogen may be around due to his or her exceptionally weak defenses. This is the reason the elderly and young children are most at risk during influenza epidemics. This interplay between wei qi (also called protective qi) and pathogenic factors (pernicious qi) determines whether a person gets sick, how the body responds to illness, and how long it takes for health to return.

The Six Pernicious Influences

The six pernicious influences, also known as the six pathogenic factors, are the causes of disease that often arise from outside the body. They are wind, cold, heat, dampness, dryness, and summer heat. Although Western medicine recognizes only viruses and bacteria as external pathogens, the Chinese observed that the body mirrors certain climatic conditions. Although a diagnosis of "wind and cold invading the lungs" might sound primitive, this type of diagnosis accurately describes the way a certain type of pathogenic factor behaves inside the human body. The wind symptoms act just like wind in nature: They come and go, often without warning.

Similarly, the cold symptoms act as they do in nature: they cause contraction, they slow functions down, and they make the person feel cold. The high degree of effectiveness in treating this type of disorder (such as with herbs that "repel wind and scatter cold") is proof that the diagnosis is much more than a mere philosophical idea. Thousands of years of trial and error through observation of nature and the human body have led to numerous effective treatments in Chinese medicine for viral infections that fit this pattern.

When learning about and discussing the various internal "climates" of the human body, it is important to remember that they may not always match the external climate. It is quite common for a person to develop symptoms of cold and dampness in rainy winter weather, but it is also possible to develop heat symptoms under the same weather conditions. Illness is the combination of the particular pathogen involved and a person's unique response to it. It is also possible for the pernicious influences to arise from internal causes. In this case, they usually result from a chronic internal imbalance. Descriptions of the six pernicious influences follow.

Wind in Traditional Chinese Medicine

The pernicious influence of wind is considered the major cause of illness in traditional Chinese patterns of disharmony. It combines readily with other pathogens, giving rise to syndromes such as wind cold, wind heat, and wind dampness. This pathogenic factor possesses the qualities of wind in nature, appearing without warning and constantly changing. Considered a yang form of a pathogenic factor, it often attacks the upper body, head, throat, and eyes. Wind causes movement, so it is usually involved when there are symptoms of twitching, spasms, or shaking. The organ most often affected by external wind is the lung; internal wind most commonly is related to an imbalance in the liver.

Syndromes of Wind

Wind Cold: In this syndrome, the pernicious influence of wind combines with that of cold. The person experiences symptoms of chills, fever (which is less severe than the chills), no sweating, headache, nasal congestion, and stiffness and pain in the shoulders, upper back, neck, and occipital area (back of the head). Cold causes objects to contract, and its effects in the body are no different. It causes chills, and the shivering causes the muscles to become tight and stiff. Although actual shivering may not occur, the person has difficulty staying warm, even when dressed properly for the conditions. Wind cold is traditionally treated with warm, diaphoretic (sweat-inducing) herbs to disperse the cold and repel the wind.

Wind Heat: Caused by a combination of pathogens, this syndrome is seen typically in the common cold or flu. The person may have symptoms of red face, high fever, sore throat, red eyes, thirst, red tongue, and a rapid pulse. Treatment for wind heat syndrome includes herbs that clear heat and repel wind.

Wind Damp: Arthritis is one of the possible manifestations of this pattern. Like dampness in nature, which is persistent and requires time to eradicate, the dampness pathogenic influence is more difficult to treat and takes some time to resolve. The influence of wind also causes the pain to migrate from joint to joint, sometimes

disappearing for a while only to reappear without warning. Treatment for this syndrome includes herbs that remove dampness and improve circulation of qi and blood through the affected areas. Moxibustion therapy, the application of heat, is particularly helpful in this situation.

Wind Water: This is a sudden attack of edema (swelling due to severe fluid retention), usually from allergic reactions. Diaphoretic (sweat-inducing) or diuretic (urine-producing) herbs are used along with acupuncture and moxibustion to treat this condition. The herbs help the body eliminate fluid, moxibustion helps the body metabolize fluids and improves circulation, and acupuncture moves stagnant fluids and expels the pathogenic factor.

Wind Rash: This category includes any skin condition that appears suddenly. Since dampness often plays a role in this condition, it can be more difficult to treat. Treatment can include herbs that "scatter wind, clear heat, and drain dampness." For example, if the rash is red and burns, herbs that clear heat are also used. Monitoring the diet is always an essential part of treatment.

Liver Wind Moving Internally: This is an internal condition of the liver that can result from a long-term imbalance; the usual chronic patterns are liver yin deficiency or blood deficiency. Signs of this condition are various abnormal body movements, such as twitching, shaking, convulsions, and spasms. The liver is in charge of the smooth movement of qi and blood in the body as well as harmonious movement within the body. An imbalance in the liver impairs this function, producing abnormal movement, and the influence of wind stirs this movement at unpredictable times.

Excessive Heat Producing Wind: If heat is too extreme, it can cause a sudden collapse, as in heatstroke. It can also cause sudden convulsions, such as those that occur in children with a high fever. Compare this internal process with what happens in nature when rising hot air causes gusts of high wind.

Blood Deficiency Leading to Wind: Since the liver stores blood, a deficiency of blood affects the liver, leading to wind. This condition can produce numbness and cramping. When the blood is tonified, these symptoms disappear.

Cold in Traditional Chinese Medicine

The cold pathogenic factor is considered a yin pathogenic factor. Its nature is to slow movement down, causing tightness, contraction, stagnation, and impaired circulation. When it is an external pathogenic factor, cold can attack the skin, muscles, and lungs. When it is an internal pathogenic factor, cold can cause an impairment in the normal functions of the spleen, stomach, and kidneys.

Syndromes of Cold

Wind Cold: In combination with the pathogenic factor of wind, cold attacks the exterior of the body and the lungs, causing chills, lack of sweating, occipital headache (pain at the base of the skull), upper body aches, tight shoulders and neck, and a congested nose. The influence of wind causes the symptoms to appear suddenly and affect the upper body, while cold causes the muscles to contract, causing the stiffness and pain. Nasal secretions are clear -- another sign of cold. The treatment principle is to repel the wind and disperse the cold with warm diaphoretic herbs, acupuncture, and moxibustion.

Obstruction Due to Cold: Traditionally known as cold bi (blockage) pain, this condition typically takes the form of body aches or joint pain that is relieved by warmth. The most common Western diagnosis for this pattern is arthritis. Since the syndrome is caused by cold, the joint may actually feel cold to the touch, and the pain typically gets worse in cold weather. The Chinese treatment principle is to increase circulation and warm the acupuncture meridians through which qi and blood circulate by means of moxibustion, acupuncture, and herbs.

Cold Attacking the Spleen and Stomach: In this externally caused disorder, cold causes digestive symptoms such as abdominal pain, clear vomit, and watery diarrhea. Although it usually accompanies an externally contracted cold or stomach bacteria or virus (what we commonly refer to as stomach "flu"), this syndrome can also be caused by eating too many cold foods such as ice cream.

Cold Congealing the Liver Meridian: The liver meridian passes through the genital area, and this condition is a manifestation of cold in that meridian. Symptoms include testicular pain or hernia pain. Moxibustion, acupuncture, and herbs can often correct this imbalance.

Spleen Yang Deficiency: If a person has an underlying deficiency of spleen yang (deficiency in energy and heat needed in order to digest food), cold can severely impair digestive function. Symptoms of spleen yang deficiency include watery stools with undigested food, cold extremities, edema, and a slow pulse. When a person with this underlying deficiency is also affected by external cold pathogens, the imbalance is especially difficult to eliminate. Treatment first expels the cold pathogenic factor. Then it tonifies the yang aspect of the spleen and kidneys to bring about a long-term increase in the body's basic metabolism, or its ability to maintain the heat needed for proper digestion. Spleen yang deficiency is treated with moxibustion and warming herbs that tonify spleen yang.

Kidney Yang Deficiency: Since the kidneys are the source of yang metabolic fire for the entire body, a deficiency in kidney yang can make the individual especially prone to cold. The symptoms of kidney yang deficiency include an inability to stay warm, cold extremities, low sex drive, frequent urination, edema (fluid retention), and pain

in the low back. The yang deficiency can be corrected with long-term application of moxibustion and consumption of herbs that tonify kidney yang, thereby increasing metabolic fire.

Heat in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Heat, or fire, is a yang pernicious influence. As in nature, heat causes expansion and increased activity. When out of balance, heat can lead to irritability, fever, and inflammatory conditions. By its nature, heat rises, appearing as a red face and eyes, sore throat, and dizziness. If heat affects the heart or liver, anger may result. Heat tends to affect the body fluids, leading to thirst, constipation, and dark urine. Since it can produce wind, heat can lead to spasms.

Syndromes of Heat

Wind Heat: This very common condition appears mostly as the common cold and flu. Wind combines with heat to produce symptoms of fever, sore throat, thirst, headache, sweating, rapid pulse, and sometimes a red tip of the tongue. The treatment principle is to repel the wind and clear the heat with acupuncture and herbal formulas.

Excess Heat in the Organs: Symptoms of this yang excess condition are, typically, irritability, thirst, dry throat, concentrated (dark or burning) urine, constipation, red tongue with a yellow coat, and a full, rapid pulse. Other symptoms depend on the organ affected. For example, heart fire produces severe emotional disturbances; stomach fire can cause mouth ulcers; liver fire might stir up extreme anger; lung fire might bring about an accumulation of yellow mucus in the lungs. In all cases, the treatment is to clear the excess heat with herbs and with manipulation of acupuncture points that have an affinity for the organ affected.

Deficiency Heat: This syndrome is caused by a deficiency in the yin, cooling aspect of an organ; the resulting imbalance causes heat to flare up. The general symptoms of deficiency heat are red cheeks, night sweats, irritability, chronic inflammation, red tongue with no coat, and a thin, rapid pulse. Other symptoms depend on the organ affected. When the kidneys have deficiency heat, chronic urinary tract infections can occur; deficiency heat in the lungs can lead to a chronic dry cough; and the heat from heart yin deficiency can cause insomnia.

Dampness in Traditional Chinese Medicine

In nature, dampness soaks the ground and everything that comes in contact with it, and stagnation results. Once something becomes damp, it can take a long time for it

to dry out again, especially in wet weather. The yin pathogenic influence of dampness has similar qualities: It is persistent and heavy, and it can be difficult to resolve. A person who spends a lot of time in the rain, lives in a damp environment, or sleeps on the ground may be susceptible to external dampness. Similarly, a person who eats large amounts of ice cream, cold foods and drinks, greasy foods, and sweets is prone to imbalances of internal dampness. Dampness has both tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible dampness includes phlegm, edema (fluid retention), and discharges. Intangible dampness includes a person's subjective feelings of heaviness and dizziness. A "slippery" pulse and a greasy tongue coating usually accompany both types of dampness. In general, symptoms of dampness in the body include water retention, swelling, feelings of heaviness, coughing or vomiting phlegm, and skin rashes that ooze or are crusty (as in eczema).

Since dampness is heavy, it has a tendency to sink downward to affect the lower parts of the body: A person may experience a feeling of sinking or heaviness, and swelling frequently affects the legs. These characteristics are the opposite of wind, which has a tendency to affect the upper part of the body. When dampness combines with heat, the condition of damp heat develops, which can cause such symptoms as dark burning urine, sticky foul-smelling stools, yellow vaginal discharges, and jaundice.

Syndromes of Dampness

Wind Damp: This form of the common cold is characterized by chills, headache, afternoon fever, nausea, and diarrhea. A person may describe feeling as if a wet towel is wrapped around the head. Treatment includes moxibustion and aromatic herbs that repel wind and drain dampness.

Wind Damp Joint Pain: This condition is characterized by a dull and heavy pain and numbness that can persist in certain joints. Rheumatic pain that gets worse in damp weather is a good example of this type of imbalance. The condition tends to be chronic and resistant to treatment. Treatment with acupuncture and moxibustion can relieve the stiffness and pain. Herbs that clear wind damp, such as mulberry branches (sang zhi) and cinnamon twigs (gui zhi), are used to decrease swelling and improve circulation.

Damp and Toxins on the Skin: This condition includes any skin inflammation that also has a weepy, damp nature, such as eczema, skin ulcers, and allergic reactions that produce a discharge (skin eruptions that ooze or that are crusty). Herbs are used both internally and in the form of topical poultices.

Internal Dampness: Typically, this is due to an imbalance in the spleen, symptoms of internal dampness include bloating, diarrhea, lack of appetite, undigested food in the stools, fatigue, and possible edema in the abdominal area. Since excessive dampness in the spleen is stored in the lungs, a damp spleen can often lead to frequent colds

and allergies. Treatment of internal dampness focuses on eliminating the dampness with diuretic herbs and activating the spleen with tonifying herbs.

Dryness in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Dryness is a yang pernicious influence. It is associated with the autumn season due to the lack of humidity in most areas at that time of year. Its influence on the body is drying and astringent. It can easily deplete the body fluids, causing constipation, dry cough, concentrated urine, dryness in the throat and nose, thirst, and dry skin. Dryness typically enters the body through the nose and mouth, quickly affecting the lungs.

Syndromes of Dryness

External Warm Dryness: This syndrome is viewed traditionally as the leftover heat from summer teaming up with the dryness of autumn to attack the body. Symptoms include fever, headache, thirst, dry mouth, dry nose, dry eyes, dry cough with scanty mucus, red tongue, and a rapid pulse. Treatment involves the use of moistening herbs combined with herbs that repel wind. Pears are considered healing foods in conditions of dryness; they are very moistening and are readily available in the autumn season.

External Cool Dryness: Traditionally considered an illness of late autumn, this pattern has symptoms of chills, mild fever, lack of sweating, dry cough, nasal congestion, dry and itchy throat, and a wiry and floating pulse. Treatment is very similar to that for wind cold, with the addition of some moistening herbs.

Internal Dryness: In this chronic condition, the body fluids have been depleted over time. It can be both a result or cause of yin or blood deficiency, and it is more commonly seen in the elderly. In its more acute form, internal dryness can result from the depletion of body fluids due to sweating, vomiting, diarrhea, or bleeding. Prolonged internal or external heat usually has a detrimental long-term effect on body fluids, depleting them. Typical symptoms of internal dryness are dry, itchy skin, thirst, constipation, and a chronic shortage of body fluids. Treatment depends on the particular organ and vital substance affected by the imbalance. Yin or blood tonics are typically employed along with herbs that assist the body in retaining fluids.

Summer Heat in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Summer heat is a yang pernicious influence that typically occurs in the heat and humidity of summer. The excessive sweating also leads to dark, concentrated urine, and depletion of the body's yin can occur. The extreme heat also affects the heart, leading to restlessness or even coma in severe cases such as heatstroke. When

summer heat combines with dampness due to humidity and overconsumption of sugary drinks, such as soft drinks, the spleen is also affected. This leads to a loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and fatigue. Treatment of summer heat is complex, depending on the organs and additional pathogenic factors involved. Usually, herbs are used that clear excess heat from within the body along with herbs that moisten the interior. Two common foods that are very effective in the treatment of this pattern are watermelon (xi gua) and mung beans (lu dou). There is also a point behind the knees associated with clearing heat; holding ice behind the knees helps the body cool down quickly. When digestive disturbances occur due to a combination of dampness and summer heat, cooling herbs are combined with herbs that clear turbid dampness, such as patchouli (huo xiang).

The Seven Emotions

The seven basic emotions related to organ function are anger, joy, worry, pensiveness, sadness, fear, and shock (fright). Although the mind/body connection has been acknowledged only relatively recently in Western medicine, the interaction of emotions with the physical body is an essential aspect of traditional Chinese medicine. Each organ has a corresponding emotion; imbalance of this emotion can affect the organ's function. For example, prolonged anger can lead to an imbalance in the liver. At the same time, liver imbalances can produce symptoms of anger, often leading to a self-perpetuating cycle.

In discussing the emotional aspect of the disease process, it is important to remember that it is normal to experience the full range of emotions. It is only when a particular emotion is experienced over a prolonged period or with particular intensity that it becomes a source of imbalance. It is obviously important for a person with severe emotional problems to get professional help from a trained psychotherapist. But even in these cases, the therapy is more effective when the corresponding organ imbalance is rectified. Acupuncture is especially effective in treating disorders of the emotions. Even when it is not completely effective in treating a physical ailment, it almost always brings about a state of emotional peacefulness.

Anger

Anger is associated with the liver. By its nature, anger causes qi to rise, leading to a red face and red eyes, headaches, and dizziness. This matches the pattern of liver fire rising. Anger can also cause liver qi to "attack the spleen," producing lack of appetite, indigestion, and diarrhea. In a more long-term view, suppressed anger or frustration often causes liver qi to become stagnant; this might result in depression or menstrual disorders. It is interesting to note that people who take herbs to release stagnant liver qi often experience bouts of anger as the stagnation is relieved. The

anger passes as the condition clears. Similarly, anger and irritability are often the determining factor in diagnosing liver qi stagnation. Many people are relieved to know their rage has a physiologic basis.

Joy

The emotion of joy is connected with the heart. A disorder related to joy may sound perplexing, since most people want as much joy in their life as possible. The disorders from this emotion are not caused by happiness; rather, the imbalance comes from too much excitement or stimulation, or sudden good news that comes as a shock to the system. When evaluating stress levels, psychologists look at all sources of stress, both positive and negative. Clearly the death of a spouse or a job loss is a significant source of stress. However, a marriage or job promotion, while a happy occasion, is also a source of stress. A person who is constantly on the go, partying, and living a life of excess can eventually develop heart imbalances with palpitations, anxiety, and insomnia. A person with heart imbalances may also exhibit emotional symptoms, since the heart is the seat of the spirit (shen). A person with extreme disturbances of heart shen might be seen chattering happily to himself with outbursts of laughter. Such behavior results from the heart organ's inability to provide a stable resting place for the spirit. This type of imbalance is treated with acupuncture along the heart meridian. Herbal treatments consist of formulas that nourish heart blood or yin. If heart fire disturbs the spirit, herbs that clear heat from the heart are used.

Worry

A very common emotion in our stress-filled society, worry can deplete the energy of the spleen. This can cause digestive disturbances and eventually lead to chronic fatigue: A weakened spleen cannot efficiently turn food into qi, and the lungs are unable to extract qi from air efficiently. A person who worries too much "carries the weight of the world on their shoulders," a good description of how a person feels when her weak spleen qi leads to dampness. Treatment would include moxa and herbs that strengthen the spleen, allowing a person the energy to deal with life's problems instead of dwelling on them.

Pensiveness

Too much thinking or obsessing about a topic can also deplete the spleen, causing a stagnation of its qi. A person with this condition may exhibit such symptoms as poor appetite, forgetting to eat, and bloating after eating. In time, the person may develop a pale complexion from a deficiency of spleen qi. This can eventually affect the heart, causing the person to dream excessively at night. Students are often

affected by this imbalance; the standard treatment is the use of herbs that tonify heart blood and spleen qi.

Sadness

Sadness or grief affects the lungs, producing fatigue, shortness of breath, crying, or depression. Treatment for this condition involves acupuncture to points along the lung and kidney meridians. Often, herbal formulas are used that tonify the qi or yin of the lungs.

Fear

The emotion of fear is related to the kidneys. This relationship can readily be seen when extreme fear causes a person to urinate uncontrollably. In children, this can also manifest as bed-wetting, which psychologists have linked to insecurity and anxiety. Long-term anxiety due to worrying about the future can deplete the kidneys of yin, yang, and qi, eventually leading to chronic weakness. Treatment involves tonifying the kidneys with yin or yang tonics, depending on the particular symptoms.

Shock

Shock is especially debilitating to the kidneys and heart. The "fight or flight" reaction causes an excessive release of adrenaline from the adrenal glands that sit on top of the kidneys. This causes the heart to respond with palpitations, anxiety, and insomnia. Chronic stress from shock can be very debilitating to the entire system, causing a wide range of problems. Severe shock can have a long-term effect on the heart shen, as is evident in victims of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Treatment involves psychotherapy, herbs that calm the spirit and nourish the heart and kidneys, and regular acupuncture treatments.

Poor Dietary Habits

Poor dietary habits are a major cause of disease. Since food is the medicine we take most often, many illnesses can be quite difficult to treat unless changes occur in a person's diet. Some of the eating and drinking habits that can lead to disease are explained below.

Irregular Times and Amounts: It is important to consider the time it takes food to pass through the stomach. Simple fruits and vegetables can leave the stomach after about 20 minutes, while more concentrated proteins, starches, and fats may take 4 to 5 hours. If the stomach contains partially digested food when the person eats another

meal, the digestive process can be seriously impaired. This would be similar to getting a small fire started with kindling and then dumping a load of logs on the fire. Even though logs are good fuel, the fledgling fire was not ready for so much fuel. Conversely, if a person waits too long between meals, secretion of digestive juices stops. This would be akin to letting the kindling go out before putting logs on the fire. We need to eat when the stomach signals true hunger. Consumption of liquids is also an important cause of imbalance. If a person drinks a large glass of cold water after a meal, the digestive juices become diluted. (The stomach secretes just enough enzymes to digest a particular meal.) Also, the stomach needs a certain amount of heat for the chemical reactions of the digestive process to take place; cold liquids slow the reaction. It is best for the contents of the stomach to be a soup-like consistency, since too much dryness can also disturb digestion. Achieving this consistency can be accomplished by sipping liquids, preferably warm, along with a meal. In China and other Asian countries, it is common to serve soup with meals. If a person desires cool water, the water should be consumed at least half an hour before a meal or three hours after a meal, when the stomach is empty.

Consuming the Wrong Types of Food: Foods have different energetic qualities; something appropriate for one type of person or climate might be unhealthy for another body type or weather pattern. For example, cold and raw foods can be healthy in hot weather or for a person who has too much internal heat. Conversely, these foods can deplete the spleen qi and yang and cause dampness in cold weather or in persons who have too much internal cold. In coastal California, for example, residents experience all four seasons in a 24-hour day. It might be foggy and cold in the morning, making a hot breakfast an appropriate choice. By midday, it can be sunny and hot, a better time to consume fruits and salads. Similarly, spicy food is appropriate for cold weather or persons who are yang deficient, but it can cause imbalance in hot weather, especially in persons who have internal heat. This goes to show that no food is always healthy; it is a matter of choosing foods that match the internal and external climates. Certain foods, such as sweets or alcohol, are meant to be used infrequently and in small quantities; overconsumption can cause a wide range of problems.

Overeating or Undereating: Malnutrition due to undereating can lead to a chronic deficiency of qi and blood. While more common in developing countries, this condition is also seen in developed countries in conditions of poverty and in persons who suffer from emotional imbalances and substance abuse. Treatment includes herbs that tonify qi and blood, along with an improvement in nutritional intake. In the West, overconsumption is a far more common problem, leading to a high incidence of heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. In traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture is used to reduce cravings; dietary and lifestyle counseling are also important.

Food Cravings and Addictions: The human body is designed to process a wide variety of foods to meet our needs. Fad diets or addictions to a narrow range of foods can be debilitating. Some essential nutrients are likely to be missing from a narrow diet. By eating a wide assortment of different-colored vegetables, whole grains, and proteins, we can receive the nutrition we need to function at a high level of wellness.

Contaminated Food: Although more common in developing or tropical countries, parasites are a problem all over the world. They can wreak havoc on the digestive organs, damaging the qi of the spleen and stomach. Herbs that kill parasites are quite strong, so it is important to have an accurate diagnosis through a stool test before beginning treatment. Other sources of contamination are toxins produced by bacterial contamination in the course of processing food. Water-borne pathogens are another source of disease, and water of questionable quality should always be boiled. Treatment of pathogenic microorganisms depends on the type of pathogen involved. In general, gastrointestinal distress caused by microorganisms can be treated with herbal medicines. Although herb formulas can be remarkably effective, they should be considered a first-aid measure until a person can see their health care practitioner.

Miscellaneous Causes of Disease

Lack of Exercise: Too little exercise can lead to stagnation of qi and blood and, subsequently, a variety of degenerative diseases, including obesity, cancer, and heart disease. Moderate exercise strengthens the heart and lungs and stimulates the flow of blood and lymph, the body's filtration system, which filters out toxins. In fact, exercise is the only way to pump lymph through the body, since lymph isn't powered by the heart. Some of the traditional Chinese ideas about lack of exercise are expressed in the ancient texts:

"Sleeping or lying down too much hurts the qi." When a person oversleeps, he typically feels tired all day.

"Too much sitting hurts the muscles." This refers to the fact that lack of exercise causes the muscles to atrophy.

On the other hand, too much activity can hurt the body. This is especially true if a person is fighting a cold or is already depleted and in need of rest. In these cases, almost any exercise can drain the qi. Some of the traditional ideas about excessive activity:

"Too much standing hurts the bones." People who must stand all day at work, especially on a concrete floor, can vouch for the truth of this statement. Some of the conditions that can be caused by standing too much are sore feet, painful joints, and varicose veins.

"Too much walking hurts the tendons." Tendonitis is a very common condition, especially among runners. Computer work and repetitive stress injuries are also frequent causes of tendon injury.

"Too much work for the heart injures the spirit (shen)." Since the heart is the seat of the mind, too much mental work affects the spirit. It is important to get sufficient physical exercise to avoid this imbalance.

Predisposition to Disease: We inherit our prenatal qi and essence from our parents. This genetic inheritance is outside our control, and it can be the determining factor in a number of ailments. It is necessary for a person with a weak inherited constitution to pursue a very healthy lifestyle to avoid disease.

Accidents and Injuries: These causes of disease are self-explanatory. However, a person with strong qi and blood will recover from injuries much faster than a person who is deficient in these vital substances. Traditional Chinese medicine is especially effective in treating injuries of all types.

Side Effects of Medical Treatments: This is especially common with Western medicine, where the list of possible side effects for a drug might fill two pages of text. A recent study found that in some hospitals, as many as 30 percent of patients at any given time are receiving treatment for the side effects of the drugs they're taking. Herbal medicine can be very helpful in reducing many of these side effects; cancer patients in Chinese hospitals, for example, are routinely prescribed herbs to help counteract the side effects of chemotherapy. Although herbal medicine is exceptionally safe, side effects can occur, although they are rarely serious. For example, many herbs are hard to digest and can cause loose stools. An herbalist takes this into account when preparing a formula for a patient, adding specific herbs to counteract these side effects. If herbs are improperly prescribed, on the other hand, the side effects can be more severe. For example, a person who suffers from high blood pressure should never be given the herb Ephedra (ma huang), since it can cause a rise in blood pressure. For this reason, traditional Chinese medical texts also list formulas that are used to counteract the effects of improper treatments.

Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine draws on ancient practices. Herbal medicine is as old as humanity itself. Early human beings were hunter-gatherers whose survival depended on their knowledge of their environment. Direct experience taught them which plants were toxic, which plants imparted strength and sustained life, and which had special healing qualities. These early discoveries were passed along until thousands of years and millions of human trials brought about the evolution of an incredibly sophisticated system of diagnosis and herbal medicine.

Thousands of medicinal substances are used in China today. Indeed, more than a million tons of herbs are used each year in China. Thirty herbs, mostly tonics, account

for more than 50 percent of this figure, with licorice topping the list at 86,000 tons. This information may seem astonishing to the minds of Westerners, who see herbal medicine as a new development in healing. From a practical perspective, however, a fairly complete pharmacy stocks about 450 different individual herbs. From this collection of herbs, a clinical herbalist employs more than 250 standard formulas, each of which can be modified to fit a patient's individual pattern of disharmony. The herbalist or practitioner combines herbs based on the diagnosis, using a traditional herbal formula as a foundation and adding other herbs specific to the individual's complaint and constitution. As the person's health improves, the nature of the imbalance changes, so the herb formula must also change. Some herbs are deleted when they are no longer needed, while others more appropriate to the changing condition are added.

Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine Categories

Herbs are classified according to whether they have a warming or cooling effect on the body. Their taste also has significance. Generally, sweet herbs tonify qi, sour herbs are astringent, bitter herbs dry damp and clear heat, acrid herbs disperse stagnation, and salty herbs have a softening, purging effect. Both individual herbs and herbal formulas are organized into categories, based on diagnostic patterns. For example, if a person has deficient kidney yang, the practitioner selects herbs from the category of "herbs that tonify yang." The therapeutic categories of herbs follow.

Herbs that Release the Exterior: When the body's protective qi is repelling a pathogenic influence, the struggle occurs in the exterior layers of the body. Herbs in this category have an outward dispersing action, preventing the disease from penetrating to the interior of the body. Warm herbs in this category can expel wind cold by inducing perspiration and warming the body; cool, acrid herbs are chosen to repel wind heat.

Herbs that Clear Heat: This category of cooling herbs clears all kinds of internal heat: excess heat, heat from deficiency, heat in the blood, heat with toxicity, and damp heat.

Downward Draining Herbs: These herbs treat differing degrees of constipation and are used as cathartics, purgatives, and mild lubricating laxatives.

Herbs that Drain Dampness: This category contains herbs that remove dampness in the form of edema (swelling due to fluid retention) or urinary disorders.

Herbs that Dispel Wind Dampness: Used mostly for arthritis and skin conditions, these herbs increase circulation and reduce swelling and inflammation.

Herbs that Transform Phlegm and Stop Coughing: Some of these herbs relax the cough reflex, others clear phlegm. For heat phlegm, cooling moistening expectorants are chosen; warming drying expectorants are used to treat cold phlegm.

Aromatic Herbs that Transform Dampness: If dampness overwhelms the digestive organs, these herbs penetrate the dampness with their aroma and revive the spleen.

Herbs that Relieve Food Stagnation: When food is stuck in the stomach and won't move, this category of herbs is chosen in order to move the stagnation.

Herbs that Regulate Qi: These herbs relieve painful distention, remove stagnation from the digestive system, and move qi that is stuck in the liver.

Herbs that Regulate Blood: Herbs in this category are divided into those that stop bleeding and those that increase circulation and remove stagnation.

Herbs that Warm the Interior: Warming the metabolism at a deep level, these herbs dispel cold conditions and revive the digestive fire, the metabolic energy required to digest food. When it is low (as in spleen yang deficiency), digestion is weak and the person craves warm foods and liquids.

Tonifying Herbs: Divided into herbs that tonify yin, yang, qi, or blood, this is the superior category of medicines. These herbs can prevent disease rather than simply treat disease that has already appeared. Nourishing and strengthening, they can be used long-term to correct deficiencies of the vital substances (qi, blood, body fluids, essence).

Astringent Herbs: These herbs prevent the excessive loss of fluids, such as diarrhea, excessive urination, or sweating.

Herbs that Calm the Spirit: These substances have a calming effect and are used for anxiety, insomnia, palpitations, and irritability.

Herbs that Open the Heart Orifice: Containing aromatic substances, usually resins, these herbs can revive a person's consciousness. Some are used for conditions such as angina.

Herbs that Clear Internal Wind and Tremors: These herbs treat muscle spasms, hypertension, and involuntary movements.

Herbs that Expel Parasites: These herbs can destroy or expel various parasites from the body.

Substances for External Application: These consist of herbs and minerals, many of them toxic if taken internally, that are applied topically for skin problems, bruises, spasms, and sprains.

Traditional Herbal Formulas

Traditional formulas are an intricate combination of herbs chosen to address the various aspects of a disease pattern. The chief herb in the formula addresses the major complaint; the formula usually contains more of this particular herb than other herbs. The deputy herbs assist the chief herb in its function, while the assistant herbs reinforce the effects of the chief and deputy or perform a secondary function. The envoy directs the formula to a certain part of the body, or it harmonizes and detoxifies the other parts of the formula. For example, Ephedra Decoction is used for wind cold with wheezing, stiff neck from cold, and a lack of sweating. Ephedra is the chief herb, since it treats all of the main symptoms. Cinnamon twig is the deputy because it assists Ephedra in promoting sweating and warming the body. Apricot seed acts as the assistant by focusing on the wheezing, while licorice is the envoy because it harmonizes the actions of the other herbs and restrains the Ephedra from inducing too much sweating. Larger formulas may have multiple herbs that produce the different functions, depending on the desired action of the formula. Herbs can be taken in the form of decoctions, pills, liquid extracts, powdered extracts, and syrups.

Bulk herbs boiled in decoctions tend to be the strongest medicine, followed by concentrated liquid or powdered extracts, and pills. All are effective, and the use of the different forms depends on the individual's personal choice. If you don't have the time to make a decoction or you don't like the taste, pills or capsules will be more effective, simply because you'll be more likely to take them. The concentrated liquid extracts tend to take effect quickly, so they are useful in cases where fast action is important, and the syrups are good for sore throats or as tonics. However, many of the more concentrated extracts are available only from a health care practitioner. In whatever form they are taken, though, accurately prescribed herbal formulas are exceptionally effective in restoring health and vitality. This ancient art of traditional herbal medicine is, without a doubt, one of China's great gifts to humanity.

Acupuncture

The flow of qi through the body occurs within a closed system of channels, or meridians. There are 12 major meridians, and they correspond to the 12 organ systems: six yin organs and six yang organs. Traditional organ theory pairs yin and yang organs according to their structure and function and the interconnection of their meridians. In addition, eight extra meridians are interconnected with all the channels. This network of meridians allows the qi, or life force, to reach all the tissues and organs, providing nourishment, warmth, and energy to all parts of the body. The flow of qi travels from channel to channel, passing through all the meridians.

In this way, qi passes through all the major meridians and their corresponding organs every day. Although the meridians are deep within the body, points along them are accessible from the surface of the skin. It is the manipulation of these points by means of pressure, heat, or needles that is the basis for acupressure, moxibustion, and acupuncture, respectively. The qi that flows through the meridians can be manipulated at the acupuncture points, bringing healing energy to organs that need it and moving energy away from areas that are impaired due to stagnation of qi. Qi works in conjunction with the other vital substances to keep your body healthy.