

Together In Health

The Qi, Yin & Yang of Stress

Finding Calm In This Uncertain Time



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Stress is a daily part of our lives and it can be something we perceive as a good stressor or a harmful stressor; yet either kind creates a drain or stagnation to our energy (Qi), when there is more stress than our constitution can handle. The more often we allow stressors, whether the good or harmful kind, to build up to the point that they drain or stagnate our Qi, the more likely we are to have symptoms.

In its mild form - stress that is not harmonious causes mild symptoms of pain, discomfort, and mental restlessness. Perhaps it makes your sleep more broken, inspires us to do habits we label "unhealthy." Maybe it strains relationships.

When we allow stress to consume our daily lives, the depletion and stagnation of Qi can lead to what Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) calls deficient or stagnant Blood or retention of Fluids. These further imbalances from depleted or stagnant Qi are the diagnoses behind more chronic conditions such as chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, immune deficiency, hormonal imbalance, more severe pain and increasing intensity of mental unrest.

Of course it is not possible to eliminate stress from our lives, and it is the Yin and Yang aspect of stress that provides the harmony that is life. Without having the polar opposites that are Yin and Yang, an interesting topic for a future blog, life would be a tad bland, dare I say "free of the drama. "



So, how does TCM understand the effects stress has on our body? Stress is a natural occurrence of life, that is here to stay and it has a fundamental impact on the state of our Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang. All aspects of our daily function & activity, right down to our cellular structure are triggered by stressors. Take the Immune system for example. In a healthy body it is not actively working, but sitting idle until triggered by a stressor such as a pathogen.

Daily activity and behaviors also impact our body's Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang. What we chose to eat, how we sleep, what we think, how we breathe, how we respond to stress, all has an affect to either build, move and balance - or block, stagnate, or deplete Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang. Stress both promotes and depletes ones Qi, and both circulates and stagnates that same Qi. It might sound strange but without stress, Qi would become depressed, and in turn we would feel depression.

Exercise offers us a nice example of the potential for healthy or unhealthy balances of Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang. As our common guidelines tell us, we should try to move 10-20 minutes a day, stand more, sit less, try to perform more vigorous exercise that elevates our heart rate, 1-2 hours a week and build strength.



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These recommendations are translated into TCM terms as:
Move 10+ minutes/day, sit less, stand more - "Move the Qi"
Increase strength and vigorous exercise - "Stimulate Yang"
Increase heart rate - "Invigorate Blood circulation"
Balance of low & high Intensity - "Balance Yin/Yang"

So if "the right" amount of exercise and movement for each individual is harmonious for their body's needs, one will find harmony in the amount and movements of Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang. And this promotes more vitality of the mental and physical body, lessens onset and intensity of disease.

In pathology, our lack of movement or too high a volume of movement causes the inverse which is more mental and physical disease and higher intensity of symptoms.

Too much sitting or minimal exercise - "Qi that does not move, stagnates and over time weakens it."

Too much or prolonged intense exercise - "Qi can suffer depletion or stagnation and if high intensity is prolonged, the Qi can become exhausted."

In summary, TCM pathology suggests that we can expect to experience a tendency toward Qi deficiency with not enough food, sleep, breath and movement. And a tendency toward Qi stagnation from too much food, sleep, thought, exercise.



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Symptoms develop right away from Qi deficiency and Qi stagnation that can be relatively mild. And if the Qi is not regulated with treatment and/or changes in behavior the condition will progress to involving the health of the Blood, Yin and Yang and disease will become chronic.

So, we know that stress is here to stay, and life's variety and spice (Yin and Yang quality of life) might be less interesting without it. The great news is that we can promote movement and production of Qi when we do nourishing things to calm our stress. And by doing so, we may prevent, heal and reduce the intensity of those disorders currently caused by or made worse by stress.

Life is certainly challenging us and likely straining and stagnating our Qi a great deal in the past weeks. And, for many of us we are feeling the need for immediate solutions to manage our stress. Those tools we will discover to calm the fear and uncertainty that is present during this stressful time are the very same skills we will find valuable when life returns to what is our perceived "normal."

Perhaps a silver lining in this time is the transformations that will be left for our daily lives after we welcome curiosity and discovery - maybe even playfulness - in recognizing those skills that calm each of us, in a way that we enjoy.



So where to begin? Here are just a few ideas that might stimulate your playful curiosity. Which of these might you explore and most enjoy so that you can start transforming stress into more ease.

- Gratitude Journal
- Emotional tool chest for your senses
- Breath technique
- Acupressure, Ear seeds pressure
- Mantra, Prayer
- Visualization, Guided Meditation
- Nutritious and Mindful eating
- Exercise
- Tai Chi and Qi Gong
- Quality sleep and rest

In my next blog I will start with my personal favorite. The Gratitude Journal. "An Attitude of Gratitude" as I like to call it. I hope you can find a way to have fun with this idea. It is my favorite because it is easy to do and in my experience, transformative.

Until next time, my sincerest wishes for vitality, health and longevity.



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