

Health WellNews

WINTER has arrived...

Acupuncture and the Season of Winter



Winter is just one of the five seasons acknowledged by Traditional Chinese Medicine. The ancient Chinese followed the belief humans should live in harmony with the cycles of nature. During the winter months, the darkness and cold indicate we should slow down, take care of our health, conserve our strength and replenish our energy for the upcoming spring and summer months. This is observed in the animal kingdom and it should also be considered a good rule of thumb for human beings.

Each season has multiple associations that help us adjust our habits as things change, which makes it easier to keep the body and mind balanced. Winter is ruled by the water element. The water element is associated with the kidneys and urinary bladder. According to TCM philosophy, the kidneys are the source of all energy found within the body. This energy, frequently called Qi (pronounced "chee"), is what keeps us alive and allows our bodies to function properly. During the winter months, it is vital that we nourish and nurture our kidney Qi.

Winter is typically a time when we decrease our daily activities. Because of this, we should also decrease the amount of food we eat to avoid gaining excess weight. It is also recommended excessively cold and raw foods be avoided or at least countered with things like hot tea. Cold and raw foods can deplete the Qi over time. This can lead to problems with digestion, sleep and much more.

It is suggested during the winter months, we should emphasize foods warming to the body. This includes things like soups, stews, root vegetables, beans, garlic and ginger. Also foods like whole grains and roasted nuts can help keep the body's core warm, while providing healthy nourishment.

Aside from eating according to the seasons, there are also other things we can do to keep ourselves in tune with our environment, which will ultimately keep us healthy. TCM is a non-invasive way to build the Qi and keep the body functioning properly throughout the winter, as well as the other seasons.

TCM incorporates quite a few different modalities. Acupuncture is probably the most commonly known of these modalities and it is a wonderful tool for boosting and replenishing kidney Qi. Moxibustion is another TCM modality that involves burning crushed mugwort on acupuncture points to help increase the core body temperature and keep blood circulating throughout all parts of the body.

There is also another form of Qi known as Wei Qi (pronounced "way chee") that is frequently compared to our immune system. Regular acupuncture treatments, proper sleep, a healthy diet and exercise are all ways to keep the Wei Qi strong.

One of the most important things anybody can do during the winter months to stay healthy is drink plenty of water. Winter, in most places, literally drains the moisture out of the body. It is recommended that we drink at least 64 ounces of water per day, even during the winter months. However, the thought of drinking cold water in cold weather is a concept that tends to keep a lot of people clinically dehydrated during the winter months. This is why warm water with lemon or hot tea are good substitutes. We are still ingesting water, while avoiding the cold that could potentially damage our core.

By following the guidelines set forth by nature, we can also remain in balance with the natural world around us. This is how our ancestors did it and it served them quite well. Perhaps there is something to be learned from the wisdom our elders pass down through the generations, aside from just some intriguing tales.



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Fight Holiday Stress with Acupuncture

The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy, celebration and love. But for many, the holidays mean added stress, anxiety and lack of sleep. Some polls show Americans spend an average of 42 hours annually on holiday activities. This could be anything from shopping to traveling to preparing food. And all of that adds up to extra stress that deteriorates the body and mind. Mental and physical stress then translates into oxidative stress at the cellular level. Oxidative stress, over time, can actually lead to disease.

The good news is there are many ways to deal with and handle added holiday stress. One of these ways is through the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This medical system has been around for nearly 3,500 years and can greatly improve our quality of life. TCM is a holistic and natural

way to combat anxiety and stress. Acupuncture is one of the modalities this medical system utilizes. Acupuncture has the ability to induce deep relaxation throughout the mind, body and soul. In fact, many people report falling asleep during their acupuncture treatments.

Numerous studies have been done to show how acupuncture can decrease stress. A study at Yale University showed auricular, or ear acupuncture, significantly lowered stress levels in mothers whose children were undergoing surgery. Multiple studies also confirm acupuncture can lower both systolic and diastolic blood pressure readings. And blood pressure is one of the first physical signs a person is stressed out.

In TCM, each season is associated with an element. Winter is associated with the element of water. Starting every day during the holidays/ winter season with a large glass of room temperature water can not only keep the body hydrated, but it can also prevent added stress at the cellular level. From a metaphorical stance, water is calming to the mind and body. So when we feel that twinge of anxiety coming on, visualizing water, like an ocean or a lake, can actually help decrease the stress levels.

As mentioned above, chronic stress can lead to oxidative stress at the cellular level. Chronic pain sufferers can attest to how stress affects their bodies. For many people who deal with diseases like fibromyalgia, the excess stress around the holidays can actually increase the amount of pain in the body. Regular acupuncture treatments, even during the holidays can be very beneficial for those who

have chronic health and pain issues. Acupuncture can reduce inflammation and relieve pain in as few as one to two treatments.

Another helpful tip to deal with holiday stress, is to get out in nature. Yes, it can be cold during the holiday season. However, studies show spending even as little as five minutes outside among nature can lower blood pressure and decrease stress. And what better way to admire the beautiful lights and decorations that frequent so many neighborhoods during this time of year, than to step outside for a breath of fresh air or a quick walk around the block?



Acupuncture is also a wonderful tool to combat insomnia that can frequently wreak havoc around the holidays. Traveling, packing and multiple holiday events can really interfere with getting a good night's sleep. Acupuncture can definitely help with that. Because it is so relaxing, many people take healing power naps when they are receiving their acupuncture treatments.

Before the holiday season kicks in, contact a locally licensed acupuncturist to discuss how they can help you deal with stress and anxiety. You'll be glad you did.

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Five Acupuncture Points for Winter

Winter is a word that conjures up many different images, including snowmen, sleigh rides and holidays. During the winter months, nature is resting and replenishing itself for the upcoming spring. And as we are part of nature, we should also be focusing on rest and relaxation.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) teaches that we should live in harmony with the seasons. When we don't, that's when disease and illness occur. Living in harmony with the season of winter means we should avoid eating excessively cold or raw foods, we should focus our attention inward and we should make time to relax and rejuvenate our bodies.

Winter is associated with the element of water, the kidneys and the urinary bladder. The kidney energetic pathway opens to the ears and therefore, they should be protected from the cold that occurs during the winter months. Every major organ in the body is also assigned an energetic pathway in TCM theory. These pathways allow energy or Qi (pronounced "chee") to flow throughout the body, which keeps everything functioning properly. When the Qi becomes deficient, stagnant or blocked, then disease can develop. During the season of winter, this may manifest as ear aches, low back pain, knee pain, urinary issues, anxiety or fatigue.

To keep the kidney and urinary bladder functioning properly within the TCM system, things like acupuncture, herbal formulas, nutritional counseling and practices like qi gong or tai chi may need to be incorporated. There are over 350 acupuncture points on the body, but there are some that work exceptionally well during the winter season to help keep the body free from disease.



- 1 KIDNEY 3** – This point is located bilaterally on the inner lower leg, in the depression just behind the medial malleolus. Kidney 3 is a very important point that can help with everything from low back pain to ear aches.
- 2 SPLEEN 6** – This point is located bilaterally on the inner lower leg, about three thumb-breadths above the inner malleolus. Spleen 6 can help improve immune system function and fight fatigue.
- 3 LIVER 3** – This point is located bilaterally on the top of the foot, in the depression about one thumb-breadth from the edge of the webbing between the first and second toes. This point can be used to decrease headaches and help with some urinary issues.
- 4 STOMACH 36** – Located bilaterally on the outer lower leg, it can be found one finger-breadth from the border of the upper tibia and about three thumb-breadths below the lower border of the knee cap. Stomach 36 is known as the longevity point in TCM and is frequently used by practitioners. It can help with fatigue, dizziness and knee pain.
- 5 URINARY BLADDER 23** – Located bilaterally, on either side of the spine, it can be found one and a half thumb-breadths from the lower border of the second lumbar vertebra. Urinary Bladder 23 is another frequently used point that helps with deafness, dizziness, knee pain, low back pain and urinary issues.

Any of these points can be used alone or in conjunction with others. They can be manually stimulated using pressure from a finger or dull, rounded tool. But for best effects, it is recommended acupuncture be applied.



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Herbal Tonics for Winter

What do most people think of when they hear the word winter? Cold weather, heavy coats, snow, short days and sipping a cup of cocoa by the fire in pajamas and fuzzy socks. These are just some of the images we conjure up when winter is mentioned. And winter is definitely a time of rest and rejuvenation. During the winter months, it is recommended people slow down, reflect on the year that has passed and conserve and replenish their energy for the upcoming spring and summer months.

Traditional Chinese Medicine echoes these sentiments and teaches us we should live in harmony with nature. In TCM, there is a concept known as Qi (pronounced "chee"). Qi is frequently likened to energy. When TCM teaches us to preserve our Qi, especially during the winter months, it is for our own good and to keep us healthy.



According to TCM, the winter months are associated with the kidneys and urinary bladder. Just on top of the kidneys, sit the adrenal glands. The kidneys and the adrenal glands play a crucial role in our Qi, so it is vital we take good care of them and keep them energized. Herbs and herbal formulas are a wonderful way to keep the kidneys and adrenal glands functioning properly.

There are plenty of herbs and herbal formulas used in TCM. They all have their own set of properties and uses. Let's look at some of the herbs and formulas that can be used to tonify or boost the kidneys and keep the body healthy during the cold winter season.



CINNAMON OR ROU GUI: This herb is not just an everyday kitchen herb. Due to its warming properties, it is great to add to food and drink during the cold winter months. Rou Gui promotes circulation and tonifies the energy of the kidneys.



LYCIUM FRUIT, GOJI BERRIES OR GOU QI ZI: These sweet little red berries are powerhouses when it comes to boosting kidney energy. They are used frequently to help people who have adrenal fatigue. They are also great for boosting immunity and are highly recommended to be used during the fall and winter months.



RHODIOLA OR HONG JING TIAN:

This is a highly treasured herb throughout the Asian communities. It is an energizing adaptogen that helps tonify the Qi of the body. It is also used frequently to reduce stress due to its ability to decrease cortisol levels in the body. Excess stress can greatly affect the kidneys and adrenal glands leading to things like insomnia and depression. And since most people have to continue working throughout the winter months, the addition of this herb could be quite beneficial.



YIN QIAO SAN:

This is an herbal formula composed of nine to 10 different herbs. While it is not specifically a tonic, it is a great formula to have on hand during the winter. It is frequently prescribed to treat colds and flu. Yin Qiao San is a handy little formula to have around when everybody in the office is coming to work sick.

Herbs can be very beneficial and help keep the body free from illness. The herbs and formula mentioned above are just a few examples that would be good to have around during the winter season.

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