

TCM: Ageing

Ageing is a spontaneous process. The body loses its power over time. This gradually leads to low energy, bodily changes, vulnerability to disease and lower adaptability to changes.

Traditional Chinese Medicine believes ageing is centred around the five organs - heart, liver, lungs, spleen and kidneys. The body's ability to maintain, repair and defend itself declines over time.

The heart regulates blood flow. When this function declines, there will be a shortness of breath, palpitations, pale complexion, sensitivity to coldness, chest pains or a tightness in the chest. TCM practitioners believe the heart houses the mind - an under-performing heart leads to problems such as changes in sleeping patterns, nervousness, decreased memory and learning ability, slow reactions, disorientation, mental disorder or behavioural changes.

According to TCM, the liver promotes qi movement inside the body. It rules tendons and nails and opens into the eyes. When liver blood is inadequate, eyesight suffers, the skin gets dryer and one grows weak and tired. If the liver fails to nourish the tendons and nails, it can lead to limb weakness, joint stiffness, a hunched back, clumsiness, and brittle and deformed nails. A sluggish liver stemming from impaired flow of qi leads to dizziness, numbness, anxiety, irritability and emotional problems.

The lung, in TCM belief, dominates qi, rules respiration and water channels, monitors the skin and hair, and opens into the nose. When it is dysfunctional, it can lead to a trembling voice, breath shortness, coughing, excessive throat and nasal secretions, chest oppression, sweating and constipation. The sense of smell declines.

The spleen is the primary organ for digestion and absorption. It provides the nutrients needed for changes in the body. It also governs the movement of blood and rules the muscles, opening into the mouth. Signs of spleen

weakness are a poor sense of smell, decreased appetite, indigestion, irregular bowel functions, puffiness, obesity or being underweight, loss of muscular mass, tiredness, organs slipping out of place, anaemia and slow clotting time.

The kidney rules metabolism, grasps qi, manifests in the hair, and opens into the ears and genital organs. Kidney deterioration is regarded as the root of ageing. Related signs include diminished hormone levels, decrease in energy and vigour, loss of bone strength and density, shrinkage in the sexual organs, changes in the menstrual cycle, urinary problems, loose teeth, limb soreness, impaired hearing, grey and thinning hair.

Age-related changes occur in everyone, but there is no reliable way to predict how each person will age. Signs and symptoms vary in different people and even different organs. It is the cumulative effect of the interaction of the genes, environment, culture, diet, exercise and illnesses. One of the mainstays in TCM is a differentiation of disharmony in the above organ systems for each individual, followed by tailor-made treatments. The kidney and spleen are the main targets of treatment.

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