

HEALTH

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TCM: spinning out

Dizziness is used to describe different sensations, from being lightheaded to feeling weak or unsteady. Doctors call this condition vertigo when there is a feeling of spinning. Vertigo can be accompanied by nausea, vomiting, sweating and fainting.

The causes of dizziness are quite diverse and are often symptoms of other conditions such as disorders of balance like Meniere's syndrome and motion sickness. Dizziness may also be experienced with epilepsy, hypertension, hypotension, and head injuries. It should be treated according to the cause and symptoms.

In TCM, dizziness is simply regarded as a malnourishment or disturbance of the brain. It can be caused by external pathogenic factors, impairment of an internal organ or trauma. Wind, phlegm, fire and blood stasis are the major culprits with affected organs chiefly being the liver, the spleen and the kidneys. TCM physicians treat dizziness according to the disharmony patterns in the body.

Meniere's syndrome is a common disease of the inner ear. Individuals typically present episodes of sudden dizziness, varying levels of hearing loss, a sense of congestion in the ears or ringing in the ears. When there are also symptoms like chest discomfort, nausea, poor appetite and fatigue, TCM diagnoses this condition as a phlegm and dampness obstruction. The remedy aims to dissolve the phlegm and dampness, and reinforce the spleen and stomach. The main herbal ingredients used in treatments include pinellia tuber, tangerine peel and poria.

Dizziness induced by emotional stress, and accompanied by ringing in the ears, a throbbing headache, a flushed face, irritability, dream-disturbed sleep, and "floating" sensations are believed to be due to hyperactivity of the liver which create wind pathogens that disturb the brain.

These patterns of disharmony tend to develop in hypertensive individuals. A gastrodia and uncaria decoction is prescribed to soothe the liver.

Dizziness occurring in elderly people may be associated with kidney deficiencies, as ageing exhausts the kidney essence and leads to depleted brain marrow. Other symptoms include soreness of the lower back, knee weakness, listlessness, poor memory, and ringing in the ears. Herbs for replenishing the kidney essence are processed rehmannia root, wolfberry and cornus fruit.

Dizziness induced by fatigue and aggravated by movement can be a result of *chi* and blood deficiency. This is also often the diagnosis when there is hypotension, anaemia or major bleeding and the dizziness is accompanied by a "faint" feeling. Eight-treasure decoction is frequently prescribed for this deficiency.

Brain vascular problems or head injuries can cause dizziness related to blood stasis. In TCM, herbs such as peach kernel, safflower and red sage root are used to activate blood circulation. Anxiety disorders may also lead to a lightheaded feeling, TCM believes this is due to a dysfunction of the heart and liver. A licorice, wheat and jujube decoction can be used.

Acupressure can help to relieve the discomfort of motion sickness; you can apply this yourself by pressing down on the *nei guan* acupoint with your thumbnail. This acupoint is two thumb-lengths above the middle of the inside of the wrist.

Please see a qualified medical practitioner if the dizziness is severe to rule out any other medical condition.

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