

## HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz  
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

## TCM: Calendar girls

In Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) understanding, menstruation occurs when a woman reaches puberty - her uterus matures and her kidney essence is enriched to a certain extent. The kidney organ then will produce a substance called *tian-gui* for promoting sexual function. Under the action of this substance, two meridians - the Conception Vessel and Thoroughfare Vessel - are exuberant and flushed with abundant *qi* and blood. The excessive *qi* and blood will empty into the uterus and produce regular menses.

TCM regards menstruation as not just womb bleeding, but a phenomenon resulting from physiological fluctuations. The fluctuations are mainly related to kidney function and the flow of blood and *qi*. They dominate the production of

*tian-gui* as well as the activities in the meridians leading to a cyclic menses flow from the uterus. For menstrual regulation, TCM applies therapeutic principles and incorporates techniques along each phase of development.

After menstruation finishes, the Thoroughfare Vessel will have evacuated its blood. The kidney organ must enrich its essence gradually so as to produce *tian-gui* and let the blood flow back to the meridian. Therefore, in the proliferation phase (sixth to 10th day), doctors aim to replenish blood and kidney essence and promote the growth of the uterine lining and development of the ovum (egg).

During ovulation (11th to 16th day), the kidney organ transforms its essence into promotional energy to ensure that

the ovum reaches the fallopian tube and meets with the sperm. TCM regards this as a transitional period where the kidney *yin* becomes kidney *yang*. Doctors aim to fortify the kidney organ, warm the meridians to activate flow and remove any stasis.

In the secretion phase (17th to 28th day), active blood supply promotes further ripening of the released follicle in the ovary and helps a fertilised egg's implantation in the uterus. The liver and kidney organs are involved in actively redistributing the blood and *qi*, therefore doctors will ensure the organs stay in optimal condition.

In menstruation (first to fifth day), when fertilisation doesn't happen, *tian-gui* will be used up quickly and the

uterine lining and blood are shed. This phase usually doesn't need special management, but when flow is disrupted or there's menstrual pain, doctors will harmonise the blood and promote *qi* movement for relief. If all these developmental phases occur smoothly, there won't be menstrual problems.

Practically all of these remedies are customised to individual conditions. They're helpful for those who suffer from problems such as functional uterine bleeding, menstrual pain, endometriosis and functional infertility. The techniques have little adverse effects and show no inhibited effect on ovary functioning after long-term use.

You should consult your doctor if you're undergoing hormone therapy or artificial insemination to avoid interference with herbal medicines.

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**Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton  
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Medicine Holdings (icm.com.hk).  
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