

HEALTH

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TCM: Weary woes

Fatigue seems to be an integral part of modern life. Sometimes, it can't be overcome by rest, a proper diet, or a low-stress environment. The exhaustion often coincides with problems such as impaired concentration or memory, difficulty sleeping, irritability, headache, blurred vision, dry eyes or mouth, palpitation and sweating disorders.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) theory, chronic fatigue primarily indicates a deficient state. The patterns of deficiency are diverse and physicians usually differentiate it by aspect (*qi*, blood, yin or yang); by organ (liver, heart, spleen, kidney and lung); or by a combination of two or more of these things in many cases.

Qi deficiency is the leading factor in the body's lethargy. Tired people may have weaknesses in their lung and spleen systems, because these two organs are responsible for the body's *qi* production. Symptoms may include a pale face, shortness of breath, sweating, low resistance to disease, poor appetite, limb weakness, loose bowels and bloating. Common herbs to tonify the *qi* are ginseng, astragalus, pilose asiabell root, pseudostellaria root, largehead atractylodes rhizome and liquorice root. A representative formula to rectify *qi* deficiency is four-gentlemen decoction (*si jun zi tang*).

When fatigue is caused by blood deficiency, the heart and liver systems are usually affected. There is insufficient nourishment for the organs and tissues,

and also dysfunction of the heart and liver, which produce a pale and lustreless complexion, dizziness, a pale tongue and lips, irregular heartbeat, disturbed sleep, forgetfulness, and a tingling sensation in the limbs. Blood tonics in TCM usually use angelica root, rehmannia root, fleecflower root and white peony root as the main ingredients for enhancing blood production. A classic formula for blood deficiency is four-substance decoction (*si wu tang*).

Fatigue can also be due to kidney yang deficiency: symptoms are limb coldness, soreness of the waist, weakness in the lower limbs, night-time urination, and sexual or menstrual problems.

TCM remedies aim at warming the kidney and nourishing the blood; a

classic formula for this pattern is restore the kidney pill (*you gui wan*). Fatigue patterns vary greatly from person to person. Fatigue can also be treated with acupuncture and moxibustion, which are particularly useful as they can bring energy to deficient organs, and are applied to important meridians to renew the overall energy level. All recommended remedies should be taken over a substantial time period as chronic weakness takes longer to return to a balanced state. Lifestyle adjustments make the treatment more effective.

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