

HEALTH

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TCM: Pain barriers

The change of life is a colloquial term for menopause because it ends one phase of a woman's life: her reproductive years.

In preparing to enter a new phase, the body's production of sex hormones fluctuates and declines, causing a series of physical changes such as menstrual irregularities, hot flushes, insomnia, mood swings, vaginal and bladder problems. This gradual transition varies greatly among women. Some may go through it easily but many find their lives are seriously disrupted. Western women may have hot flushes and night sweats while Chinese women tend to have bone and joint pain, poor memory and fatigue.

According to TCM, the kidney system is responsible for the reproductive and menstrual functions. The bible of Chinese medicine, the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*, says: "The kidneys form the foundation for the body's reproduction and development. As we age, essence stored in the kidneys is depleted and when no more *tian-gui* is produced, the meridians in the pelvic region become empty and collapse, and thus women will lose the ability to menstruate and give birth."

The kidney system is also viewed as the root of life activities. Its weakness can cause imbalance of yin and yang elements in the body. That's why, apart from a change in menstrual patterns, a

wide range of signs are seen, depending on what organs are affected.

To help the body go through this transitional period, maintaining a smooth menstruation is always the first priority. TCM claims that menstrual problems such as heavy menses, scanty menses, early or delayed periods, prolonged periods, missed periods, or abnormal menses flow indicate different disharmonies have developed. Women of all ages should pay attention to menstrual irregularities and manage them as early as possible. This should be done before these become irreversible conditions and potential risks for other health problems. Appropriate protective

measures not only make menopause easier, but also help to delay the natural ageing process.

As individuals usually manifest certain subtle symptoms differently, TCM uses unique theories to interpret and correlate them with internal disharmonies. For example, kidney yin deficiency is typically associated with hot flushes, night sweating, ringing in the ear and heavy menses; kidney yang deficiency is associated with fatigue, a longer cycle with scanty flow, vaginal discharges, frequent urination and limb coldness; kidney and liver deficiencies are associated with afternoon flushes, night sweating, blurred vision, depression or irritability; disharmony between the kidney and heart will appear in the form of insomnia, palpitations and mood swings.

With various approaches and flexible applications, including herbal therapy, acupuncture, moxibustion, massage, cupping, scraping, hot compressions, bathing, qi gong and lifestyle modifications, TCM management of menopause is holistic in nature and motivates the body to reach its new phase in a balanced way.

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