

HEALTH

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TCM: Hiccups

Hiccups occur when your diaphragm involuntarily spasms. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), hiccuping is linked to stomach disharmonies. Normally, stomach *qi* moves in a downward direction. Hiccuping is the result of what's called "rebellious" *qi* - that is, *qi* that moves upwards. Since TCM regards all health conditions as being part of a syndrome pattern, it assigns hiccups to syndromes relating to disharmonies such as deficiency, excess, cold and heat.

When individuals experience a cold feeling over the epigastrium (the upper central abdominal wall) and a whitish fur on the tongue, the hiccups are slow but forceful, and may be alleviated by warmth. The condition is possibly caused by too much cold. Treatment is designed to warm the stomach and reverse the unruly rising *qi*. *Ding Xiang San* (clove powder) is used as cloves are pungent and warm, helping to disperse cold and harmonise the stomach.

Too much spicy food or alcohol can lead to stomach fire when the hiccups are loud and strong, accompanied by bad breath, thirst, constipation and a red tongue with yellowish fur. Treatment concentrates on clearing away fire and harmonising the stomach, so herbs such as bamboo leaf and persimmon stalk, and gypsum are used.

Qi stagnation in the diaphragm is indicated by continuous hiccups, which is often induced and aggravated by emotional upset. Individuals may also

have breathing difficulties, chest oppression, belching and nausea. Herbs such as inula flower and liquorice root, and ochre minerals are used to soothe the *qi* flow and calm the mind.

Intermittent, low and weak hiccups mostly belong to stomach deficiencies. There may also be excessive saliva discharge, gastric discomfort, poor appetite, loose bowels and cold limbs. Clove, white cardamom seed and medicinal evodia fruit are used to replenish *qi* and invigorate the functions of the stomach.

TCM offers some simple hiccup remedies, including dried tangerine peel (100g), five to 10 persimmon stalks or four pumpkin stalks. The ingredients can be used alone or combined as a hot tea, best drunk in one gulp. Occasionally,

hawthorn fruit is used to treat food stagnation and can cure hiccups by balancing stomach *qi*.

Acupuncture and moxibustion are also effective in regulating the stomach. Doctors often stimulate the points along the conception, pericardium and stomach meridians. The combining of points and stimulating techniques are chosen according to the syndrome. Generally, moxibustion can be used to warm the stomach and help it to resume its functions when it's a cold or deficient syndrome; acupuncture can be used for heat or *qi* stagnation syndrome.

Acupressure can help stop hiccups by reversing the abnormal *qi* flow in the stomach. The *ge shu* point, which is alongside the seventh thoracic vertebra near the bottom of the shoulderblades, affects the diaphragm; pressing it can stop the spasms that cause hiccups. You can't do this yourself, so ask a friend to place their fingers on either side of the vertebra, about one finger's width away from the spine. They should press firmly until the hiccups cease - this can take anywhere from 10 seconds to a few minutes. Another useful point is *nei guan*. Knead the middle of the wrist, two fingers breadth up from the hand, for 10 minutes or more on each hand.

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