

HEALTH

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TCM

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From woe to go

Depression involves the body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, how you feel about yourself and what you think about.

Besides the mental disturbances, associated physical complaints may include headache, dizziness, weakness, palpitations, shortness of breath, poor appetite, sweating, ear-ringing and a dry mouth. Generally the symptoms, their severity and persistence vary from person to person.

From a traditional Chinese medicine perspective, depression is related to liver dysfunction: the organ fails to regulate the emotions properly and *chi* (energy) does not flow smoothly.

Some lifestyle habits that contribute to this are lack of exercise, poor diet and repressed or overly expressed emotions, especially anger or grief.

Alongside or as a result of liver stagnation, the heart, spleen or kidney may also be affected. For example, weaknesses in the spleen may lead to fatigue and digestion problems.

Blood quality may also be affected, influencing the heart system, and inducing insomnia and restlessness.

During consultation, a TCM practitioner not only notices the mental state but also how the depression is reflected in physiological functions, the pulse or tongue. Diagnosis is based on signs from both mental and physical aspects.

One herbal formula, the Free and Easy Wanderer Plus (*Jia Wei Xiao Yao Wan*), has been in use for more than 500 years in China for depression. Its ingredients include buplerum, angelica, peony, atractylodes, poria, liquorice, peony root bark and gardenia fruit. The formula soothes the liver and clears its heat, fortifies the spleen and

replenishes the blood. It relieves symptoms such as emotional instability, sweating, headache, blurred vision, flushed cheeks, dry mouth, abdominal bloating and menstrual problems.

As depression is mainly attributed to a blockage in one or more of the internal organs and their corresponding energy pathways (meridians), a balanced diet containing a wide variety of nutrients helps to ensure proper flow inside the body.

Wholesome foods especially grains, legumes, citrus fruits, spinach, eggs, lily buds, yams, red dates, mushrooms, carrots and radishes promote *chi* flow as well as its production.

Qi gong and tai chi also benefit patients suffering from depression. The slow, gentle,

repetitive movements of these practices aid in relaxation and can significantly help reduce symptoms. These exercises may be done as part of a group to encourage social interaction, which many depressed patients avoid. The exercises also strengthen the organs and induce a smooth flow of *chi* and other bodily fluids. Regular meditation may also be helpful.

Mild to moderate depression can respond to TCM treatment, which may be combined with conventional medication or used alone under proper supervision of a TCM practitioner.

Before taking medicine, consult a TCM or medical practitioner