

HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

TCM: Mind the gaps

Memory is a function you don't think about until you begin to lose it. Some blame poor memory or loss of memory on ageing, but with a proper diet and measures to protect the brain, one should remain mentally active well into one's 80s or 90s.

In TCM, mental activities, including emotions, are known as *shen* (spirit), which is closely correlated with the functioning of internal organs.

The heart rules the *shen*, which provides nourishment for it to function. The spleen acts as the source of blood and *qi* production, and the liver regulates the *shen*, particularly in respect of emotional responses. TCM's management of mental health revolves around ensuring these organs stay in good shape.

First, TCM believes that overuse of the brain is harmful to *qi* circulation and will greatly exhaust the heart and spleen. Tonifying

ingredients such as ginseng, astragalus, pilose asiabell root, yams, lotus seeds, dates, longan aril, pumpkin and mushrooms benefit the spleen, generating more blood and *qi* and recharging the brain.

Heart exhaustion that fails to control the *shen* will result in restlessness, absentmindedness, panic attacks and sleep difficulties. Ingredients that help to nourish the heart, and to calm and promote mental clarity, include sour jujube seed, acorus, black cardamom, schisandra, Chinese senega, poria, lily buds, milk and honey.

When the problem is related to kidney weakness, individuals may also experience dizziness, ear ringing, blurred vision, grey hair, hot flushes and loose teeth. Ingredients that help include deer horns, nuts, eggs, sea cucumbers, fish sound, cherries, wolfberries, cornus fruit, conch, eels and animal marrow.

Chinese people often use ingredients such as those above in tonics to enhance their mental functions. For example, prepare walnuts (40g) and longan arils (20g), grind and mix with honey and water. It's an easy recipe for daily intake and is suitable for most people. Pig hearts are also used in brain tonics as it is believed that animal organs can be used for fortifying the corresponding organs in human bodies. A sample recipe consists of sour jujube seeds (50g), poria (50g), a pig's heart (cut in half) and lily buds (50g). Put all the ingredients in a double-steam container and add 700ml of water; steam for three hours, drink the soup and eat the organ.

.....
Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings (www.icm.com.hk). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner