

HEALTH

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TCM

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Chi to the head

Headaches often render us unproductive at work, disturb our social lives and can cause havoc with schedules.

Stress, an unbalanced diet and lack of sleep – as well as a genetic disposition to headaches – can be to blame. Other causes range from eye strain to sinusitis and life-threatening conditions such as encephalitis, meningitis, cerebral aneurysms and brain tumours.

According to traditional

Chinese medicine (TCM) theory, headaches are caused by blockages and deficiencies: a deficiency of chi (energy), which prevents chi and yang from circulating properly; a deficiency of blood, which means that the meridians aren't properly nourished and an insufficient amount is circulating to the head; and a blockage of the meridians by external pathogenic factors.

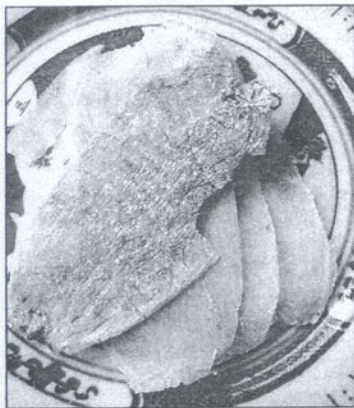
TCM treatment entails identifying the meridians involved and using herbs to target these. Headache in the crown is associated with the liver meridian. Gastrodia tuber (right) and cornus fruits are used to treat this. A forehead ache is associated with the stomach

meridian, and dahurian angelica root is usually prescribed.

Headache in the temple is related to the gallbladder meridian, with Sichuan lovage being the main treatment. If it's in the back of the head, it's associated with the bladder meridian and is usually treated by notopterygium root.

If headache is due to hypertension – which TCM regards as a state of liver-yang hyperactivity – prescriptions with gastrodia tuber and gambir vine stem are used to calm the liver, and expel wind and heat, as well as replenish the blood.

A headache after menstruation indicates deficiency, so a ginseng decoction may be used for



nourishment. In some people, headaches are associated with digestive problems. The most likely prescriptions are concoctions with pinellia tuber,

gastrodia tuber and largehead atractylodes root.

For headaches caused by cold or flu, ginger, onion, garlic, green spring onion, fermented soybean and coriander can be eaten. They have pungent and hot properties that are said to help expel evils. A simple Chinese remedy that you can make at home is spring onion tea. Use the white part of the plant only, and boil three or four onions in a cup of water.

If it's a tension headache, simple acupressure techniques may alleviate a minor one. Apply firm pressure on the web between the thumb and forefinger for about two minutes. Repeat this on the other side (this shouldn't be done by pregnant women). Another acupressure

point is located between the eyebrows in the middle of the forehead. Gently press down with your fingertips. This is said to help clear the mind as well as ease the headache. Continue the pressure for two to three minutes. Chinese meditation techniques such as qigong breathing with structured movements can also help control minor headaches.

However, TCM practitioners should suggest a hospital visit if a headache is associated with high fever, convulsions, is accompanied by confusion, or follows a blow to the head, or if a child has recurring headaches.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner