

## HEALTH

Edited by Susan Schwartz  
susan.schwartz@scmp.com

MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2008 SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

## TCM: twitch in time

Muscle twitches are usually slight movements of a small area of muscle. This is the result of local muscle contractions or the uncontrolled twitching of a single muscle group served by a single motor nerve fibre or filament.

Muscle twitches are minor and often go unnoticed. They often affect the eyelids, calf or thumb. Other kinds of muscle twitching may indicate a more serious neurological disorder.

Often muscle twitches are brought on by dietary deficiencies, an excess of caffeine, exercise, or the side effects of drugs such as diuretics, corticosteroids and oestrogens. Accompanying symptoms that suggest the muscle twitching may be of a more serious medical condition include the wasting of muscles and muscle weakness.

Since traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) approaches health in a holistic manner, twitching muscles (*yu rou shun dong*) are seen as a disharmony of the body, the result of blood deficiency, disturbances in local circulation or an invasion of external pathogens.

Basically, muscle twitching indicates that the localised area doesn't get sufficient nourishment to function normally.

TCM physicians will first identify the pattern of disharmony and then design a remedy to resume supply to the area.

Sometimes, relieving the muscle tension may also be necessary.

Eyelid twitching, for example, is an occasional discomfort induced by fatigue or stress. It usually goes away without treatment. However, if the episodes are frequent or too disturbing, appropriate treatment is needed to relieve the underlying disharmony.

When muscle twitches affect the cheek and forehead and are accompanied by vision problems, TCM remedies will aim to replenish the blood and *chi*, activate their flows and soothe the muscle fibres. A classic prescription for this is *angelica root decoction* for activating blood.

When the eyelid twitching is aggravated by fatigue or emotional distress, and also accompanied by insomnia and distraction, TCM remedies will aim to enhance the functions of the spleen and heart systems, so as to promote blood production and ensure the organs' supply to the eyelids. A recommended prescription is decoction for restoring the spleen.

When the muscle twitches involve the whole face, and are accompanied by distention in the forehead and irritability, TCM remedies will aim to soothe the liver system, so as to regain

control of the muscles as well as storage of blood. A prescription for this is decoction for calming the liver and extinguishing wind.

Acupuncture and moxibustion are also useful in overcoming eyelid twitching. These treatments can

stimulate the flow of specific meridians and thus direct blood and *chi* to the area. Practitioners usually select points

along the liver, stomach and large intestine meridians when treating muscle twitching in the facial area.

In addition, points such as *four-wei* (hairline at the corners of the forehead), *quan-zhu* (inner sides of the eyebrows) and *quan-liao* (under the cheekbones) are located on the branching collaterals that control the region. Massaging these points promotes self-healing.

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