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TCM: Shades of pale

Anaemia is a common blood disorder in which the number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin level is below normal. This condition is caused by the body's inability to produce healthy red blood cells, losing or destroying red blood cells faster than they can be replaced.

Individuals with this condition usually appear pale and experience fatigue, weakness, dizziness and frequent headaches.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, blood provides moisture and nourishment to the body. Blood originates from two sources, and several internal organs are involved in its production. First, the spleen extracts essence from ingested food and drink; this is then sent to the chest area with the help of the heart and lungs and transformed into blood. A balanced and healthy diet is important so that the spleen can extract adequate nutrients. This portion of blood contributes to most of the body's daily nourishment.

The second source of blood is essence stored in the kidney. Kidney essence travels to the bones, transforms into bone marrow, and produces blood. This portion of blood is stored in the liver and serves as the body's reserve.

Both TCM and western medicine have a similar view of the causes of anaemia, such as improper diet, digestive problems, excessive blood loss or chronic diseases.

TCM treatment aims at enhancing the production of blood as well as arresting its further depletion from the body. As the body is an organic whole, particular symptoms of anaemia correspond to the dysfunction of the organs, and aid diagnosis. TCM practitioners prescribe the remedies for anaemia depending on specific

symptoms such as paleness of the complexion, dizziness, palpitations or an irregular menstrual pattern.

Generally, herbs such as angelica root, processed rhemannia rhizome, white peony root, tuber fleeceflower root, donkey-hide gelatin and longan aril stimulate the overall process of blood production and are the main ingredients for remedies. These will be combined with other herbs depending on individual symptoms.

A sallow complexion, pale tongue and lips, fatigue, poor appetite or loose bowels indicate weakness in the spleen and stomach. Herbs such as astragalus, ginseng or pilose asiabell root will be selected for treatment. This not only ensures the generation of blood, but also boosts the spleen to generate more *chi* to help move the blood around the body.

Chronic anaemia is usually associated with liver and kidney damage, which can lead to dizziness, ear ringing, absent-mindedness, headaches, numbness or tingling feelings in the limbs. Herbs including wolfberry, dodder seed, morinda root and mulberry are used to help the body to recover.

Palpitations and insomnia are a result of the heart not functioning to full capacity. Particular herbs can be taken in these cases. For women, herbs such as the Sichuan lovage, nutgrass and costus root are used to soothe menstruation and prevent excessive blood loss.

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Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner