

HEALTH

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TCM

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Pain game

We all know pain is a warning that something is wrong with the body's workings. However, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners don't focus only on the pain. They also identify the accompanying signs.

Two fundamental concepts of TCM are involved in pain – the meridian system and *chi*.

Chi is the vital energy of the body that flows through the meridian system. When *chi* is blocked or stagnant, there may

be pain and illness. Meridians exist at every level of the body. If *chi* is blocked at skin level, you can see bruising or swelling.

Blockages at flesh level can produce stiff, sore muscles, while *chi* stagnation in the joints can create arthritis and back pain. Internal blockages may produce headaches, sore throat, chest, stomach, menstrual, nerve and sciatic pain.

Pain aggravated by pressure is an "excess type". It's caused by invasion of outside disease-causing factors, obstruction of meridians, stagnation of *chi* and blood, intestinal parasites, retention of food or obstruction by phlegm.

This can also be divided into subtypes. For example, joint pain can affect the meridians

from cold-dampness pathogens. Burning pain is usually due to damp-heat pathogens, such as acute infections, while pain alleviated by pressure is a "deficient type", caused by malnutrition due to insufficient *chi* and blood. If the pain is relieved by warmth, it's a "cold type", which occurs with abdominal pain.

Acupuncture is said to rid

blockages and promote the flow of *chi*. When the affected meridian is correctly identified, pain is believed to be relieved.

Many herbs are also used for pain treatment. Honeysuckle flower, ephedra and chrysanthemum are used for headache due to flu; stabbing muscular pain may be reduced with peach kernel, angelica, lovage, and peony root, to promote blood flow; dull abdominal pain can be treated by ginseng, astragalus and liquorice root; and abdominal colic due to food retention can be eased by hawthorn, malt and chicken's gizzard-skin.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner.