HEALTH

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TCM: sweat

I notice that I have been sweating excessively lately. I don't know whether this is due to the hot summer or if there's something wrong with my body?

The trickle of sweat down the back on a hot summer's day is quite normal, as sweating is how the body cools itself.

How much you sweat depends on how many sweat glands you have and how active they are. The way you sweat is also influenced by mood, diet, hormone level, some drugs and medical conditions. Some inherit a tendency to perspire heavily, especially on the palms, soles and underarms.

You should seek professional help if your sweating disrupts your daily routine. For instance, if you suddenly begin to sweat much more than usual for no obvious reason, sweat mostly during sleep, or your sweating is accompanied by weight loss, chest pain or tightness, palpitations, dizziness and cold clammy hands, or a change in body odour.

In traditional Chinese medicine, sweat is formed by *chi* evaporating body fluids, which then emerges from the body through the sweat pores. Normal sweating helps harmonise the internal and external body but many factors can affect the process and lead to abnormal perspiration.

Protective *chi* has the role of guiding the external body, such as warming the muscles, keeping the skin moist, enriching the subcutaneous tissues and managing the opening and closing of the pores. When the lung system is weakened, there is not sufficient protective *chi* and this will cause excess sweat. Herbs that can replenish protective *chi* include astragalus root, pilose asiabell root and ginseng.

Blood and essence are important yin components of the body. If depleted, the internal body will become unbalanced and can easily generate fire pathogens.

The fire pathogens may irritate the body fluids and force them to emerge from the body. In these cases, herbs such as angelica root, rehmannia root and cornus fruit are used to nourish the body, while herbs such as anemarrhena rhizome and peony root bark are used to clear the fire.

TCM claims that sweat is also a fluid of the heart system. Excessive sweating is considered an exploitation of the heart's *chi* and blood, leading to symptoms such as palpitations and insomnia. People who sweat abnormally usually have a heart deficiency; herbs including sour jujube seed, longan aril and Chinese senega can help this condition.

Internal heat is often the result of anything causing body disharmony. The heat promotes the vaporisation of body fluids and excessive sweating is a sign that the body is overheated. Cooling herbs such as golden thread rhizome, baical skullcap root and gardenia fruit may be necessary.

As ingredients such as oyster shell, shrivelled wheat, ephedra root, schisandra and white peony root are astringent in nature, they can arrest excessive sweating and are commonly used for symptom relief.

During consultation for abnormal sweating, physicians pay attention to the location (particular region or entire body), the time (day, night or specific hours), the nature (cool or warm, colour and smell), intensity as well as other signs to create an individualised remedy.

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