

HEALTH

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TCM: Mother's milk

Women undergo tremendous physiological changes throughout pregnancy and labour. Chinese medicine believes that new mothers generally suffer from an extra depletion of blood and body fluids, which makes them likely to have problems like sweating, vaginal discharge, aching, inadequate breast milk, bowel and urinary problems. Postnatal care is essential to speed up the body's recovery and to help with breastfeeding the newborn.

Breast milk contains the most balanced nutrients for babies, ensures healthy growth, and reduces the risk of common childhood illnesses and infections. Exclusive breastfeeding for at least four to six months is recommended for maximum benefits. However, this does not come easily for some mothers. Milk secretion is influenced by factors such as nutrient absorption, rest and mental state. TCM claims that breast milk is transformed from the blood and relies on *qi* to promote its secretion. Since both blood and *qi* come from food essence produced by the spleen and stomach, there will be little or no milk if these organs cannot supply this adequately. Furthermore, problems during labour can lead to dysfunction in two important meridians, the conception vessel and thoroughfare vessel, making it difficult to transform blood into milk. Individuals with this problem will also appear pale, experience fatigue and palpitations, have a poor appetite and thin, watery

milk. TCM treatments focus on replenishing blood and *qi*, and restoring meridian functioning to promote milk production.

Looking after a new baby takes time and effort, which adds pressure for new mothers. Emotional stress impairs the liver, leading to a sluggish flow of blood and *qi* in the meridians, which in turn disrupts milk discharge. Women with this condition usually experience depression, enlarged or engorged breasts, poor appetite and a mild fever. TCM treatments focus on relieving the stagnated liver.

Acupuncture helps to unblock the meridians and is a safe way to promote

milk secretion. Two major acupoints for stimulating milk secretion are *shaoze* and *tanzhong*, which are located on the outer side of the nail of the little finger and midpoint of the nipples respectively. In practice, physicians will also treat other points according to associated symptoms.

Eating well and choosing the right foods is crucial. As childbirth tends to bring on a cold imbalance, warm foods should be consumed. Ingredients used to promote milk production include pigs' feet, fish, shrimp, tofu, sesame, papaya, pumpkin seed, sponge cucumber, pea and soya beans, which are usually prepared in soups. For example: scale and clean a crucian carp (150 grams), and then slightly fry in oil; put in a pot and add tofu (150 grams) and black fungus (30 grams, finely sliced); boil with 500ml of chicken broth and 500ml water, then slowly simmer for about one hour.

Some foods such as pepper, safflower and malt may reduce milk secretion. A salty diet will also have this effect. A traditional way to dry up the milk supply when weaning is by boiling raw malt (60 grams) and drinking it as a tea.

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Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner