

HEALTH

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TCM: athlete fatigue

Fatigue is inevitable for athletes. Some may reach a point where simple rest is no longer adequate for full recovery. Athletes and coaches call it “burnout” or “staleness” due to overtraining and cumulative exhaustion.

The fatigue athletes feel may come as a collection of emotional and physical symptoms, including moodiness, insomnia, depression, loss of appetite, persistent muscular soreness, and susceptibility to viral infections and injuries. Medically, the syndrome is classified as a neuro-endocrine disorder.

Ancient Chinese believed chi was the fundamental entity making up the world and everything in the universe resulted from the movement and change of chi.

In TCM, chi is interpreted as the “life energy” or “life force” flowing within the

body and responsible for the majority of physiological activities.

Physical exercise involves vigorous chi activities in order to reinforce muscular contractions, promote blood flow to muscles and bones, accelerate the heart’s pumping and the lungs’ breathing.

When there is sufficient chi to enable the organs to co-ordinate and work efficiently, a high level of physical performance can be attained. Chi tonics promote its reserve and boost its efficacy with herbs such as rhodiola, ginseng, prickly acanthopanax root, cordycep and schisandra usually made into supplements to help performance.

These herbs are considered adaptogens and have been shown to increase physical capacity and promote

recovery after intense training. The body needs to constantly replenish chi from external sources such as the air we breathe, and food and drink. Achieving a balance between chi health and physical exercise is important.

Prolonged and intense physical activity makes it difficult for the body to meet the high demand for chi – the re-uptake mechanism can’t keep up and the recovery process becomes impaired.

When chi exhaustion is severe, it will result in fatigue, a lack of energy and poor physical performance. Sometimes chi disturbances develop and affect overall health. TCM practitioners use different approaches to help bring about a full recovery.

For herbal remedies, in addition to herbs such as astragalus root, largehead

atractylodes rhizome and pilose asiabell root, herbs should be selected depending on the athlete’s symptoms.

For example, to ease the symptoms of mental fatigue associated with moodiness, irritability and insomnia, angelica root, white peony root and albizia flower may be used to calm and nourish the mind.

Muscular soreness, tendon and joint pain indicate the need to use Sichuan lovage, red peony root and angelica root to promote blood circulation and remove stasis.

Fatigue of the internal organs can lead to various symptoms, with poria, Chinese yam and processed liquorice root used to help promote appetite, relieve limb weakness and abnormal bowels.

Glehnia root and dwarf lily-turf tuber help relieve sweating, thirst and feeble breathing, and processed rhemannia rhizome, cornus fruit and eucommia bark strengthen tendons and bones and warm the body.

Generally, the TCM practitioner will also consider the intensity of the sport and the age, sex, lifestyle of the athlete and the environmental factors when choosing the remedy to combat fatigue.

Proper rest, diet and nutrition are also important for athletes to remain in top physical health.

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