

## HEALTH

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## TCM: blood pressure

So much is written about high blood pressure (hypertension) but little of its opposite: hypotension. Some people such as athletes may have naturally low blood pressure. They show no signs or symptoms and their low readings are normal for them. In others, however, blood pressure drops because of certain situations or health conditions.

Hypotension is a medical concern only if it causes symptoms such as dizziness or fainting. Severe hypotension can result in shock, such as after extreme blood loss.

Blood pressure is the force of the blood pushing against the artery walls. The level varies during different activities, dropping when you sleep and rising on waking. It can also go up when you're excited, nervous or active.

Most instances of hypotension occur when the body can't restore blood pressure to normal or can't do it fast enough. It's important to see a doctor to find the reason for the low readings. If the doctor can't find a cause, the next step will be to alleviate the symptoms by raising the blood pressure.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), there is no term or definition that specifically refers to the modern concept of hypotension. However, TCM has remedies to alleviate the common symptoms such as dizziness, fainting, paleness, fatigue and blurred vision.

According to TCM principles, these symptoms point to blood and *chi* deficiencies, and are associated with the spleen, heart or kidney disharmonies. Appropriate tonic herbs can treat the underlying disharmonies, but it usually takes time to stabilise the condition. Herbal teas, a well-rounded diet, massage and moxibustion are recommended. Generally, patients are advised to consume ingredients which can boost blood and *chi*, and tonify certain organs.

*Chi* deficiency presents with dizziness, fatigue, paleness, shortness of breath and sweating. Individuals should fortify the spleen and boost the *chi*, through adding ingredients to their diet such as ginseng, astragalus root, lotus seed, beef, ginger, red dates, yams and black bone chicken to their diets.

Yang deficiency presents with dizziness, blurred vision, coldness, fatigue and heart palpitations. Individuals should boost heart and kidney function, and are advised to eat more mutton, cinnamon, leeks, eggs, animal organs and shrimp. A tea of cassia twig (10g), cassia bark (10g) and liquorice root (9g, toasted with honey) can be drunk once a day. This can elevate low blood pressure and is especially good for the elderly.

*Chi* and yin deficiency presents with dizziness, blurred vision, low spirits,

shortness of breath and hot flushes. Individuals should replenish their blood and *chi* with ingredients such as astragalus root, ginseng, angelica root and Sichuan lovage. A tea prepared with American ginseng (10g), dwarf lily-turf tuber (20g), schisandra (10g) and rock sugar (15g) is suitable to drink daily.

Disharmony in the liver and kidney will present with dizziness, ear ringing, heart palpitations and even fainting, and are usually induced by standing up too quickly. Individuals are recommended to include foods such as wolfberry, chestnuts, raspberries, black sesame, kudzu root, black bone chicken, mutton and venison into their diets.

People should eat less cold foods and those that might lower blood pressure, such as celery, onion, eggplant, banana and pineapple. Foods that induce urination such as mung bean sprouts, apple and water chestnut should also be limited.

Two massage locations - the centre of the crown of the head and behind the anklebone - are helpful for relieving symptoms. Knead forcefully on these spots two to three times a day.

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