

HEALTH

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TCM

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Enliven your liver

Good liver health is often overlooked, unlike the well-known relationship between cardiovascular health and heart attacks. And in the lead-up to Christmas, some livers may not be as well looked after as they should be.

Diseases that aren't easily cured such as hepatitis and liver cirrhosis severely affect liver function and may predispose someone to cancer.

The liver is responsible for a number of important functions,

including detoxifying blood and producing and excreting bile, which is used to break down fat. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) expands the role of the liver to include maintaining internal harmony.

This monitoring ability is based on two physiological activities in TCM: the promotion of both flowing and spreading movements.

By stimulating flow, the liver adjusts and ensures the smooth movement of *chi*, blood and body fluids, and spreads these substances throughout the body.

The liver is also responsible for regulating the amount of blood in circulation.

For example, when a person moves or exercises, the blood leaves the liver and goes to the part of the body that needs it.

The blood returns to the liver to be stored when a person rests. These aspects of the liver are so influential that the root causes of many ailments are commonly diagnosed by TCM practitioners as liver disharmonies.

According to TCM concepts, having a calm and peaceful mind is crucial for a healthy liver. Anger and emotional problems can interfere with the flow of blood and *chi* and result in stagnation of liver *chi*.

This disharmony is closely related to the development of tumours, menstrual, sexual and digestive problems.

All major organs in TCM have openings on the outer surface of the body that tell how they're functioning. Symptoms displayed by the eyes give clues to liver disorders. Blurred vision

or night blindness may indicate there's insufficient liver blood.

Damp heat in the liver and gall bladder – in western medicine it's jaundice – manifests as yellow eyes. Extreme dryness and thickening of the conjunctiva may be due to insufficient liver *yin*.

Wind and heat evils present in the liver meridian cause red, itchy and painful eyes. The eyes can provide significant information about health.

A buildup of liver fire over a long time can lead to headaches and sleep and emotional disorders.

It may also affect the health of the liver and gall bladder. Dizziness may be a symptom of hyperactive liver *yang*. Sustained hyperactive liver *yang* may be associated with hypertension.

A soup with matrimony vine (also called Chinese box thorn, right) and pork liver is helpful for alleviating itchy eyes and blurred eyesight and is able to clear liver heat.

To make the strong and bitter soup, slice the pork liver (100 grams) and marinate it with starch, soy sauce and fresh ginger juice. Defoliate a matrimony vine stem (200 grams). Save the leaves and discard the stems. Add the leaves to the simmering chicken broth (500ml) for five minutes. Add the pork liver and season with sugar and pepper.

Continue to simmer for two to three minutes until the liver is cooked, then serve.

Before taking any medicine, consult with your TCM or general practitioner.