

HEALTH

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TCM

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Liver me timbers

According to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), long-term stress and intense emotional stimulation adversely affect the liver. In TCM, the liver promotes flowing and spreading movements – by stimulating flow, the liver controls the smooth movement of *chi*, blood and body fluids, and spreads them round the entire body.

There are three functional aspects of the liver's flowing and spreading activity: regulating *chi*, regulating emotions and boosting digestive processes.

Three possible disharmonies related to emotional impacts are

stagnation of liver *chi*, counter-flow of liver *chi* and a flare-up of liver fire.

Stagnation of liver *chi* is due to the organ failing to play its regulating functions. Symptoms include anxiety, a full sensation in the chest and ribs, breast distention, a choking feeling in the throat and poor appetite.

Counter-flow of liver *chi* is said to be due to hyperactive functions, which interfere with normal digestive processes. Associated symptoms include irritability, dream-disturbed sleep, chest and abdominal distention with occasional pain, belching, acid regurgitation, stomach aches, a poor appetite and indigestion.

A liver-fire flare-up is caused by stagnated *chi* and blood flow, which begins to generate fire evils. It's normally a more severe condition that follows stagnation of liver *chi* if left untreated.

The evils are said to flush upward and irritate the upper part of the body. This could induce a flushed face, blood-shot eyes, dry mouth, dizziness, ringing in the ears, headache, a feverish sensation, irritability and insomnia. Others may include constipation, discoloured urine and nose bleeds.

These conditions are aggravated by emotional disturbances, but how each may manifest itself varies from person to person. TCM regimes are, therefore, customised, but the therapeutic aims are always to soothe the liver and make the *chi* flow smoothly.

Herbs commonly used for this include bupleurum, cyperus rhizome, turmeric root, toosendan fruit and linden root. One formula is the Free and Easy Wanderer Powder (*Xiao Yao San*), which helps the liver achieve normal flow of *chi*, blood and body fluids.

A balanced diet and normal bowel movement are crucial during stressful periods. Greasy and spicy foods don't favour a smooth *chi* flow, but fruits and vegetables help it.

Ingredients such as longan pulp, sour jujube, mulberry fruit, lotus seeds, poria and lily bud

help to ease an emotionally over-stimulated mood; Chinese yam, dates, lotus seeds, poria, coix seed, hyacinth beans and hawthorn protect the digestive system from further damage.

Drinking herbal tea when stressed can help. Useful teas include jasmine, rose, chrysanthemum, finger citron, white plum flower, tangerine peel and pith.

A dessert to aid *chi* flow and relieve stress can be made from pears (left). To prepare, peel two pears, cut in half and remove the core. Sprinkle a powder mixture of 5g finger citron and 5g processed cyperus rhizome on the pears, steam for 10 minutes.

The two herbs can be found separately in herbal stores. Eat one pear a day. This can be repeated two to three times.

Before taking medicine, see your TCM or medical practitioner