

## HEALTH

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## TCM

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## Heart of the matter

In ancient times, dissection of corpses was widely forbidden because opening up a dead body was thought to be offensive to the bereaved. It's remarkable, then, how much TCM practitioners understood about organ physiology with such rudimentary knowledge.

TCM practice focused on the functional aspects of vital organs such as the heart, liver, spleen, lungs and kidneys and how they correlated with each other, rather than putting an emphasis on anatomy.

The heart is a good example of an organ that controls more than blood circulation in TCM. Blood is propelled through the blood vessels around the body when the heart pumps. Because the heart, blood and vessels are united by their common activities, this functional relationship is known as the "ruling of the heart" in TCM.

Beyond blood circulation, another vital function of the heart in TCM is the storage of *shen*. This is a key aspect of mind or spirit in Chinese medicine. It embodies a person's vitality

and their mental, cognitive and intellectual abilities.

Signs of heart disharmonies include palpitations, restlessness, a suffocated or heavy chest, cardiac pain, insomnia, nightmares, poor memory and delirium, as well as unconsciousness.

Because the heart has ties to brain functioning through its storage of *shen*, problems such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, anorexia and neurasthenia (a psychological disorder characterised by chronic fatigue and weakness, loss of memory, and generalised aches and pains), can be treated by looking at heart function from a TCM point of view.

These problems are usually due to a deficiency where there's inadequate *chi* and blood in the heart to nourish the *shen*.

The goal is to tranquilise the mind and restore normal brain patterns by fortifying and nourishing the heart. This can be accomplished through a variety of treatments such as herbal decoctions, acupuncture, *qi gong* and *tui na* (massage).

Foods that benefit the heart include lily bulbs, oriental arborvitae seed, white fungus, longan fruit, lotus seed, lotus root (right), beef, beer, wheat, red dates, wild jujube and rose buds (often used to make tea).

Longan is a common summer fruit and can be found in most local supermarkets, either in

dried or fresh forms. A longan decoction is a simple TCM remedy for insomnia and is especially good for those under long-term stress experiencing fatigue, slow reaction times, poor memory and a loss of appetite.

It can be taken each night before bed. Prepare it by making a half cup of tea with about 5g of dried longan pulp mixed with boiling water.

After the tea has steeped and become warm, sip it slowly and eat the pulp. Rock sugar can be added for a sweeter taste. For a stronger effect, mix the tea with 1g to 1.5g of pearl powder.

Congee made from longan pulp and Euryale seed can be taken daily to invigorate the heart and spleen. In TCM, stimulating these two organs maintains a clear and fast mind.

One recipe is to wash about 25g of longan pulp, 25g of Euryale seed and 100g of glutinous rice. Put the ingredients into a pan and add one litre of water; bring the mixture quickly to the boil. Reduce the heat and leave to simmer covered, with the lid slightly off so the congee doesn't bubble up and spill over.

In about 40 minutes, the congee should be done. Add honey to taste and serve hot.

*Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner*