Integrative Practitioner

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

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Integrative Practitioner.com

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Editor's note: *This e-resource offers an introductory overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) philosophies, concepts, and protocols. It is not meant to serve as a comprehensive manual or replace the extensive medical education TCM practitioners receive. The content should be used for educational purposes only.*

An Integrative Practitioner Publication

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A Modern Approach to Traditional Chinese Medicine

WHEN THE NAME OF A PRACTICE includes the word "traditional," one cannot be faulted into thinking that it's entrenched in the past. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as practiced today, however, is not the same as it was thousands of years ago. While it is founded by ancient principles, it has continued to evolve, change, grow, and adjust to modern needs and understanding.

Like a tree, it has grown branches, with different practitioners employing different approaches and methods. While some stick closer to the roots, deeply studying the TCM classic texts and applying them to today's health problems with as much loyalty to the original meanings as possible, others have created new branches of practice, incorporating technological and other medical advances.

My approach as a Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine is a mix of classical TCM and biomedical modern TCM, of Eastern and Western, of conventional and non-conventional. My mother is a clinical nurse specialist and my father has a PhD in chemistry, so science and its rigors of analysis are foundational concepts for me.

When I started to develop knee pain in my pre-teen years, I was taken to a sports medicine physician and diagnosed with bilateral chondromalacia patella, not enough cartilage on the inside surface of the kneecap, resulting in friction and pain. I was given shoe orthotics and knee braces and sent to weekly physiotherapy for several months. The physiotherapists iced my knees, did ultrasound and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, and prescribed daily exercises. Unfortunately, my pain did not resolve, and I loathed the knee braces, which looked horrible and caused rashes. The shoe orthotics were no better, as only orthopedic-looking shoes were available at the time to fit them. I was a figure skater, dancer, and volleyball player, so while I didn't let the pain stop me from the activities I loved, I knew that I had to avoid or limit other, more painful activities, like running and hiking.

It was this experience that prompted me to study kinesiology, with thoughts of going into sport medicine for my career. As I completed my undergraduate degree, I wrote my medical college admission test exams and applied to medical schools. But during this process, I decided I needed some life experience first, so I accepted a job as a research assistant at a medical university in Japan.

My time doing research resulted in three major outcomes. First, I recognized that lab work was not for me; I needed to work in a more face-to-face environment. Second, I realized that, though science offers enormous benefits to our understanding of the world, it has many flaws, not the least of which is that it is employed and interpreted by humans with individual biases and challenges. Lastly,

I published a **paper** on ginseng root in the *European Journal of Pharmacology*, which, though I didn't think about it at the time, may have introduced my first curiosity about the medicinal value of herbs.

Though my foray into research was over, I decided to stay a second year in Japan, so I took on a job teaching English. At the time, I still had no notion that I would change my career path. I didn't even believe in the benefits of taking a multivitamin, much less Chinese herbs. However, it was in Japan that I first heard about acupuncture. My friend told me that he had received acupuncture treatment that had restored his vision from having to wear thick-lensed glasses to needing no glasses at all. I couldn't make sense of it, so I pocketed the information and moved on.

When I returned to Canada, I still intended to go to medical school to pursue a career in sports medicine, but my enthusiasm was somewhat waned. While I was in Japan, my worldview shifted. In the Western world, we put great emphasis on the individual and the minutiae. The Eastern way of thinking prioritizes the group and places higher value on the bigger picture. This altered how I saw the world and changed my thinking toward conventional medicine.

Western medicine is more likely to look for and treat an offending organ, cell type, or missing enzyme. Eastern medicine focuses on the relationships between the organs and tissues and looks for patterns of imbalance in the whole being. It aims to treat the cause for that imbalance. With this new mindset, I happened upon a book on TCM. It was a simple, introductory, image-based book that drew my eye and made me curious about what this medicine had to offer. My whole life changed.

When I enrolled in TCM school, I had never received acupuncture or taken any Chinese herbs. During my first week, I went to the student clinic and asked them to treat me. They asked me what I wanted them to treat, but I had no ills I could initially point to. They asked me how I felt at that moment. I mentioned a mild headache but brushed it off. I had had nearly daily headaches since childhood, and I was used to them and didn't need any medication. That and my still painful knees became the focus, though they also asked me about my digestion, sleep, menstrual cycles, diet, and daily habits, too.

I received acupuncture and Chinese herbs on an off throughout my first year of school and was happily surprised when my headaches disappeared and my knees became much more functional, with less pain. Since then, as a result of this TCM path, I've had the opportunity to do my internship in China, volunteer as an acupuncturist at the Vancouver 2010 Olympics, and complete a Tough Mudder without knee braces.

While I now view the world through a TCM lens, I recognize that this is a complex and sometimes confusing system with principles and philosophies that are foreign in the Western world. I have experienced this confusion and disbelief. Early in my first year of TCM school, I hit a wall, as I could not make sense of it. My teachers used words I didn't recognize, and even words I did know didn't mean what I thought they meant. They told me that the Spleen is the key organ for digestion, that the Large Intestines and Lungs are interrelated, and that Wind can cause a stroke. I'll explain later why the organs and environmental elements are capitalized.

I took their advice and decided that if I was going to study this medicine, I would have to put my already attained knowledge about anatomy, physiology, biology, and all other "ologies" into a box in my mind to be unpacked again later. I had to make the space for an entirely different way of thinking without bias, a beginner's mind. Later, once I had some understanding of the TCM approach, I was able to unpack my previous knowledge and start to incorporate it and find ways that these two different systems of medicine could relate to each other and work well together.

I hope that you, the reader, will also be able to open your beginner's mind and take in the broad strokes of how TCM offers a systematic approach to assess, diagnose, and make sound recommendations for better health.

History and **Research**

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the world's oldest systems of medicine and is thought to date back at least 23 centuries. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal remedies date back at least 2,200 years, although the earliest known written record of Chinese medicine is the *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine) from the 3rd century BCE.

TCM was heavily influenced by the philosophies, political structures, cultures, and religions of its time. These ideals changed as new ideas and leaders were adopted, and TCM's foundations have evolved throughout its history.

Most TCM scholars and practitioners would first emphasize an appreciation of one of its oldest and most revered books, the *Huangdi Neijing*, sometimes called the *Neijing*, which is considered the fundamental source for Chinese medicine and a prominent book of Daoist theory and lifestyle. This book offers teachings on how to live a healthy and long life and is written as a dialogue between emperor Huang Di and his eminent physician, Qibo. The *Neijing* was created around 300 to 200 BCE, by a group of anonymous authors. The *Neijing* abandoned the old shamanistic beliefs that disease was caused by demonic influences, and instead focuses on natural effects of diet, lifestyle, emotions, environment, and age as the reason diseases develop. According to the *Neijing*, the universe is comprised of various forces and principles, such as Yin and Yang, Qi, and the Five Elements. It also discussed the organs, pulse diagnosis, and acupuncture, and incorporated both Confucianist and Daoist philosophies.

As China's most famous philosopher, political theorist, and teacher, Confucius was a lifelong learner and teacher who championed morality with correct behavior in social relationships, respect of one's elders and hierarchy, family loyalty, sincerity, honor, compassion, and moderation.

Today, many of his teachings are found deeply rooted in TCM foundations. The *Neijing, for example,* compared wise physicians to wise rulers, stating:

"The sages do not treat those that have already fallen ill, but rather those who are not yet ill. They do not put their state in order only when revolt is underway, but before an insurrection occurs."

We can recognize this today as preventative medicine or wellness care.

Confucian ideas can also be found in the descriptions of the TCM organs, called Zang Fu, with each of the organs given a government-like title and corresponding role. For example, the heart is the king or the emperor, in charge of ruling the emotions and keeping us alive. If the emperor becomes ill, the whole court, all organs, will suffer. The importance of the relationships and responsibilities of each organ and an effort toward moderation in life are also Confucian principles.

While Confucianism offered a philosophy focused on how humans should behave, Daoism highlighted how humans should follow the laws of nature. The *Neijing* stated that people of ancient times lived much longer, surpassing 100 years old, because they lived according to the Dao. They feared that people no longer knew how to live simply, in harmony with nature and pursuing a life of moderation.

Modern TCM incorporates the Daoist principles of Yin and Yang, and of following nature's seasonal cues.

Acupuncture

The theory and practice of acupuncture originated in China, and dates to before the Common Era. By around 6000 BCE, sharpened

stone and long, sharp bones were used for acupuncture treatment, though experts speculate the tools could have been used for surgical procedures, like lancing abscesses.

The precise history of acupuncture remains a mystery. Documents sealed in 198 BCE in the Mawangdui in China have no references to acupuncture procedures, but do mention a system of meridians or channels.

Acupuncture theory states that energy, or Qi, flows through the human body and can be influenced to help create balance and health. Experts believe the earliest stages of acupuncture were what TCM practitioners today call treating "ashi" points, literally translated as "ah, yes," points of pain. A more modern form of this type of needling incorporates this in trigger point or dry needling. Some speculate that those hit by arrows or spears in battle noticed how pain traveled along pathways, while other areas of the body experienced pain remission, perhaps leading the way to other treatment approaches such as distal needling or needling away from the area of concern. Acupuncture advanced to treat more than pain with its incorporation as a form of treatment in the developing TCM diagnostic system.

Herbology

Archeological evidence from ancient tombs in China show people used herbs 5,000 years ago. The earliest written records date back to the first century of the Common Era, and Chinese herbology boasts a rich written history beyond any medical system in the world.

The *Shen Nong Ben Cao* (the Divine Farmer's Materia Medica) was the first known Chinese herbal encyclopedia, dating from about 2700 BCE. It listed 365 medicinal plants and their uses. While the original text did not survive, the information was discovered around 220 CE, and later physicians organized and built upon the text that is still considered a classic.

In the early Common Era, the *Shang Han Za Bing Lun* (Treatise on Cold Diseases) was written by Zhang Zongjing during the cholera epidemic in China and is the first text to systematically chart the progression of healing with prescribed herbal formulas, syndrome differentiation, and the use of pulse diagnosis. While the original text was also lost, it was recompiled during the Jin dynasty.

The *Bencao Gangmu* was created in the Ming Dynasty by Li Shi Zhen, who traveled and compiled extensive herbal knowledge, with over 1,800 medical substances listed. It is considered one of the greatest scientific achievements of the era and provides a clear picture of Chinese medical theory before the introduction of Western medicine in the 1800s.

Roughly 20 percent of Chinese herbal medicines used today are based on the information in these classic works, which also emphasize pulse diagnosis and pattern differentiation to determine the correct herbal formulation and associated acupuncture treatment. Nutritional therapy is also mentioned in some of these early texts.

Growth, Decline, Rebirth

TCM has grown and evolved over thousands of years. In the 1800s, hundreds of missionary and other Western doctors came to the Qing Empire. With access to Western medical texts, political leaders who governed China or led revolutions after the fall of the Qing Dynasty wanted to rid China of ancient medical ideas. Sun Yat-sen, a medical doctor who led political modernization in China during this time, advocated for Western medicine, and communist party officials regarded ancient medicine as superstitious, irrational, and non-scientific. Many practices were banned, and practitioners were often imprisoned or killed. Despite this, the traditions and skills were maintained by scholars and rural practitioners.

Today, many TCM techniques remain integrated in Chinese life, including herbal medicine, tai chi, qi gong, and eating medicinal food. In addition, these practices, as well as acupuncture and cupping, have been growing in popularity in Western cultures.

Research

TCM has employed systematic observation, testing, re-testing, and documentation of its theories, principles, and treatments for thousands of years. Modern research requires acceptable studies to employ large numbers of subjects and follow a double-blinded, randomized-control trial that is published in a reputable, peer-reviewed journal.

One of the main challenges of researching TCM is that it is customized, personalized medicine. If 100 people are suffering from classic migraines, even those that are similar in nature will be treated differently. The individual's biology, age, family history, genetics, lifestyle, habits, and environment all influence why they have migraines and will shape what treatment approaches will work for them.

With research, the goal is to test only one variable at a time. For example, to test a new pharmaceutical, one health issue, such as a migraine, is treated with one drug on a randomized group of subjects and compared to placebo treatment. Everyone gets either the drug or the placebo.

When prescribing herbal formulas, however, there is no one formula. There are many formulas. However, the formulas also treat several other health conditions. This is because TCM follows the idea that one disease can have many patterns and one pattern can cause many diseases. The same issue occurs with all TCM treatments, including acupuncture and nutrition.

> Today, many TCM techniques remain integrated in Chinese life, including herbal medicine, tai chi, qi gong, and eating medicinal food.

Another research-related challenge is creating a placebo treatment for acupuncture, which is currently the focus of most TCM-related research. Various techniques and tools have been attempted and called "sham acupuncture," including a retractable needle, using a toothpick to create a poke sensation on the skin, and needling non-acupuncture points. All have their setbacks as a testing tool because, even though they are meant to be inert, they have physical effects that are measurable.

The "gold standard" for healthcare research is the randomized placebo-controlled trial, which was first developed for assessing medications. However, this type of research becomes problematic as a research model when evaluating complex, skill-based therapies like acupuncture, surgery, and psychotherapy, as stated by John Macdonald, PhD, registered acupuncturist and adjunct senior-lecturer at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. Accordingly, Macdonald asserts that there is a, "consistent underestimation of the effect size of real acupuncture."

Despite those challenges, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends acupuncture as a treatment for a wide array of symptoms and diseases, as noted in **their 2002 report** "Acupuncture: Review and Analysis of Reports on Controlled Clinical Trials". As an example, the WHO reports that acupuncture relieves chronic pain for 55-85 percent of patients studied, a number that, "compares favorably with that of potent drugs," and outweighs placebo.

More recently, in 2017, the American College of Physicians released **new clinical guidelines** for low back pain management, which said based on a systematic review of randomized, controlled trials published through April 2015 on treatments for low back pain, clinicians and patients with acute or subacute low back pain should select nonpharmacologic treatment, including acupuncture, and chronic low back pain should initially select nonpharmacologic treatment, including acupuncture.

Since low back pain is one of the most common reasons for doctor's visits in the U.S., it is significant that medical doctors were advised, when possible, to treat low back pain with non-drug therapies, including acupuncture.

Some studies have compared acupuncture to conventional care treatment as the control group. A 2004 **randomized, controlled trial** published in the *British Medical Journal* looked at 401 patients with chronic headaches who were assigned up to 12 acupuncture treatments over three months or standard primary physician medical care. They were followed for one year after the initiation of the study, at which point the researchers found that patients who received acupuncture were taking 15 percent fewer medications, had 15 percent fewer sick days, and had 25 percent fewer doctor's visits than those under standard medical care. One benefit of this form of study was that skilled acupuncturists could customize the treatments according to their assessments.

While much of the research on acupuncture has been done to investigate its effects on pain, this is not its only benefit. Both acupuncture and Chinese herbs have been studied for their efficacy on allergies, cancer, digestive issues, anxiety, and sleep.

In 2004, the journal *Allergy* published a small study of 52 patients with seasonal allergic rhinitis. They were randomly assigned to either a semi-standardized acupuncture and Chinese herbal protocol, or to a control group that received acupuncture at non-acupuncture points and a non-specific Chinese herbal formula. Acupuncture was done once a week and herbs were taken three times a day for six weeks. Improvement was noted in 85 percent of the treatment group, but only 40 percent of **the control group**.

A 2016 **systematic** review published in the *Brazilian Journal of Nursing* investigated articles published between 2001 and 2014 on acupuncture and anxiety. From those articles, only five were found to be of reasonable quality studies, with results showing statistically positive effects and noting that, for over 400 randomized patients, "the effects from acupuncture for treating anxiety have been shown to be significant as compared to conventional treatments."

In 2014, the *World Journal of Gastroenterology* published a meta-analysis of studies published on acupuncture and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) between 1966 and February 2013. Six studies met their criteria of being randomized, placebo-controlled, and with measurable results. Their **meta-analysis** concluded that "acupuncture exhibits clinically and statistically significant control of IBS symptoms."

Chinese herbs, too, have been studied for the treatment of IBS. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a **study** in 1998, 116 patients who fulfilled the criteria for a diagnosis of IBS were randomly assigned to one of three groups to receive either an individually customized Chinese herbal formula, standard Chinese herbal formula, or a placebo for 16 weeks. Subjects were regularly evaluated by a traditional Chinese herbalist and a gastroenterologist. In this study, compared to the placebo group, both the standard and the individualized Chinese herbal therapy groups had significantly improved scores of their bowel symptoms, as rated by the subjects and gastroenterologists. The study also reported that only those taking the customized Chinese herbs improved and held the improvement at the 14-week follow up.

Several studies have investigated the mechanisms of action of acupuncture and have found increases in blood flow, release of neurotransmitters, modulation of the activation of the immune system, and changes in the functional activities of the brain.

While modern clinical research is now starting to appreciate the individual person's experience, it is valuable to know that there is indeed a wealth of good research already complete and in process about acupuncture and TCM.

Fundamentals

SINCE TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE'S (TCM) beginning was largely rooted in Daoist philosophies, the study of nature is key to understanding how the body works. TCM is a holistic medicine, considering all parts of the body, mind, and spirit as interrelated. It also recognizes that the external environment plays an essential role in how a person's health manifests.

The foundation of TCM begins with an understanding of several core philosophies and principles:

- Yin and Yang
- Eight Guiding Principles
- Five Vital Substances
- Six Pathogenic Factors
- TCM Organs
- TCM Meridians
- Five Elements

Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang are considered one of the most foundational aspects of Chinese medicine. The principle of Yin and Yang is that all things exist as "inseparable and contradictory opposites," according to the Ancient History Encyclopedia. A fundamental concept of Chinese philosophy and culture, Yin and Yang represent opposing but mutually supporting energies.

> TCM is a holistic medicine, considering all parts of the body, mind, and spirit as interrelated.

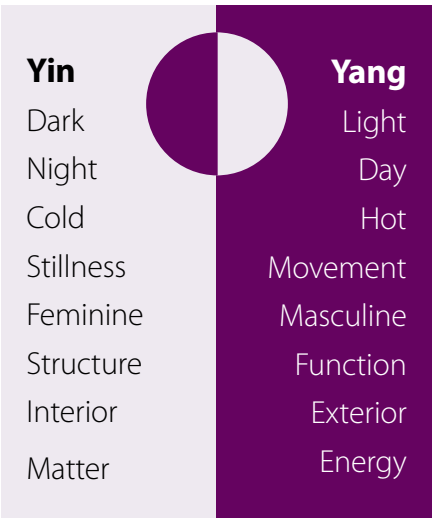
The Chinese character for the word Yin symbolizes the shady side of a hill, while the character for Yang shows the sunny side of the hill. The well-recognized taijitu symbol for Yin and Yang illustrates the idea that Yin and Yang attract and complement each other, and each side has a small element of the other embedded within. Neither side is superior to the other, and neither can exist without the other.

In TCM, the aim for an individual's Yin and Yang is not to have everything in perfect balance, but to find a moving balance of the two forces. For example, individuals need rest, but they should not remain still for too long, and individuals need exercise, but downtime is equally valuable.

Yin and Yang became popular in the 3rd century BCE, and was championed by Zou Yan, a Chinese philosopher who believed life went through five phases, fire, water, metal, wood, and earth, which is described in detail later in this e-resource.

Examples of Yin and Yang

In TCM, everything is defined by its relationships. A person may feel hot because they have too much Yang energy, or too little Yin energy, or a combination of both. TCM treatment can differ significantly even though the symptom is the same. For the over-heated patient caused by too much Yang, the practitioner needs to tone down or release the heat-causing factors, perhaps prescribing herbs that will "drain fire" like shi gao *(Gypsum fibrosum)* or zhi zi *(Fructus gardeniae)*. For the Yin deficient, overly-warm patient, the treatment must instead boost the Yin cooling element, using herbs such as bai he *(Bulbus lilii)* or nu zhen zi *(Fructus ligustri lucidi)*. While all these herbs will help cool the body, they are not interchangeable and have very different approaches.



All things can be fundamentally categorized as Yin and Yang, and the next set of TCM philosophies incorporates this.

Eight Guiding Principles

TCM expands on the concepts of Yin and Yang, and offers to assess imbalances in the body:

- Cold and Heat
- Interior and Exterior
- Deficiency and Excess
- Yin and Yang

Cold and Heat

Cold and heat work in harmony with one another. An external pathogen can have hot or cold properties. If there is too much relative cold in the body, there is a tendency toward feeling cold, poor circulation, slow metabolism, and pale complexion. In contrast, too much relative heat creates fevers, hot flashes, fast metabolism, flushed complexion, irritation, and inflammation.

Interior and Exterior

Interior and Exterior principles pinpoint the location of imbalance. Interior conditions affect the internal of the body, such as the organs, bones, deep blood vessels, nerves, the spinal cord, and brain. External conditions tend to be acute conditions that are caused by pathogens, and symptoms that affect the skin, peripheral blood vessels and nerves, and muscles.

Deficiency and Excess

Also known as "full" and "empty" or "shi" and "xu," the concepts of deficiency and excess have to do with too much or too little. Deficiencies are marked by too little of something, like blood, energy, or fluids. Chronic conditions tend to be marked by such deficiencies. Excess conditions, on the other hand, are too much of something, such as a virus, bacteria, fungus, and pain. Excess is typically associated with acute conditions.

While all diagnostic principles are interconnected, deficiency and excess emphasize meridians and organ systems, requiring the TCM practitioner to have a thorough understanding of both.

Yin and Yang

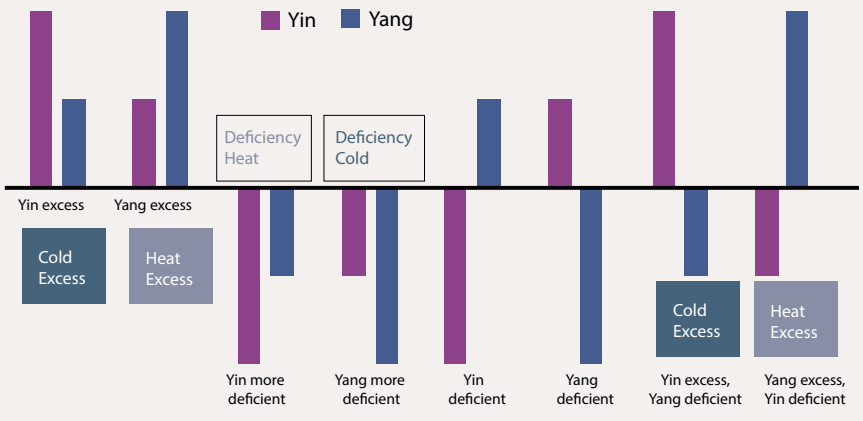
The principles with Yin characteristics are cold, deficiency, and interior, whereas the principles with Yang characteristics are heat, excess, and exterior. For TCM practitioners, Yin and Yang apply not only to symptoms, but to human traits like introvert or extrovert, depressed or manic, and quiet or loud. Understanding the qualities of different patients will help the practitioner restore balance in either Yin or Yang.

Principles in Practice

A TCM practitioner considers all eight of these principles when assessing a patient. Thus, someone with a fever, sore throat, and cough would be diagnosed as having a hot, excess, external, Yang excess. Conversely, someone with chronic fatigue syndrome, poor circulation, and slow metabolism would be assessed as cold, deficiency, internal, Yang deficiency, or perhaps both Yin and Yang deficiency.

Every patient will present with a blend of these principles, and often, they can have both excess and deficiency, heat in one area and cold in another, and simultaneous issues in both interior and exterior. The goal of the TCM practitioner is to assess the main symptoms and patterns with these

Relative Yin and Yang for Hot or Cold



guiding principles and determine the best approach.

When I treat patients, I generally address any main acute symptoms first, as they are often excess and exterior and thus easier to clear. Examples of this are a cold or an ankle sprain. Even if they are not the main reason that someone came in for treatment, if they are not addressed, the body will be committing resources to deal with them, so it's important to clear them as soon as possible. Conditions that are deficient generally take more time to improve, as do ones that are more deeply internal. If treatment progress is slow, it can be helpful to re-assess the patient on these basic eight principles to see if something has been missed.

Five Vital Substances

In TCM, there are three intangible substances considered vital to keeping us alive:

- Qi
- Jing
- Shen

Together they are called the "Three Treasures." In addition, there are two tangible groups of substances, also essential to life:

- Body Fluids (Jin Ye)
- Blood (Xue)

These make up what are called the Five Vital Substances in TCM. By understanding these, a practitioner can then complete a TCM diagnosis and formulate a treatment plan.

Qi

A whole book can be written about Qi (pronounced *chi*). The Chinese character for Qi is comprised of two symbols that, when combined, signify the steam rising from rice as it cooks. Qi is most often defined as "energy," but it is much more complex. It has also been translated as "vital energy," "life force," "breath," and "oxygen."

China is not the only country to come up with the idea of Qi. Indian culture calls it prana, ancient Greeks called it pneuma, Hawaiians call it mana, Japanese call it ki, Tibetan Buddhists call it lüng, and Hebrews call it ruah.

Everything has Qi. We now understand that everything is composed of molecules that are in continuous movement. Everything has either kinetic, moving energy or potential, stored energy. Ancient Chinese scholars defined potential energy as Yin and kinetic energy as Yang.

As living beings, we receive energy from various sources, including the energy we are born with both genetic or ancestral, energy from the air we breathe, and energy from the food and drink we consume. How we live, move, sleep, rest, eat, think, deal with stress, and form daily habits goes a long way to support, build up, or waste an individual's Qi.

There are many types of Qi, from the kind that activates growth and development and is present at birth, called primordial or pre-natal Qi (Yuan Qi), to the energy we acquire from food (Gu Qi) and the air we breathe (Kong Qi). There is also Qi of the chest (Zong Qi), nutritive Qi that flows with the blood (Ying Qi), defensive Qi that circulates near the surface of the body to protect it from intruders (Wei Qi), and Qi that circulates in channels or meridians of the body to nourish the organs (Zhen Qi). Finally, each organ of the body is said to define its own Qi, so each of us has Lung Qi, Spleen Qi, Liver Qi, and so forth.

Jing

While the word Qi is generally recognized, Jing is a much less familiar term. Jing is usually translated as essence, though some today equate it to DNA, as it is considered our congenital energy and we receive Jing energy from our parents. Some people start life with an abundance of Jing, and some less so. Like Qi, how a person expends their Jing can affect longevity, health, and the aging process. A life of moderation, enough sleep and rest, and good nutrition can all help to protect Jing and slow down its inevitable gradual decline.

Jing is said to reside in the Kidneys, and TCM states that stress, overwork, anxiety, and fear all negatively affect the Kidneys, just as it overburdens the adrenals, the glands that sit atop the physical kidneys.

Shen

Shen is translated as both "spirit" and "mind," and it relates to our consciousness, mental health, emotions, and how we radiate our presence in the world. At night, Shen is said to return to its place of residence in the Heart, but one can observe its vitality, or lack thereof, in the eyes. Many people have observed a shift to the light behind or within the eyes when a person experiences a major shock.

If the Shen is disrupted, insomnia, anxiety, forgetfulness, restlessness, and mental illness can occur. Healthy Shen depends on sufficient Jing, Qi, and Blood, while disordered Shen can negatively affect these vital substances.

Body Fluids (Jin Ye)

The Jin Ye are the body fluids that everyone can recognize, including sweat, tears, saliva, mucus, and urine. They are divided into two main categories, Jin and Ye:

- Jin fluids circulate near the exterior of the body, nourishing the skin and muscles. These fluids are light, thin, watery, and clear.
- Ye fluids circulate more internally, moistening the joints, organs, brain, and orifices. These fluids are dense, thick, heavy, and turbid.

The only body fluid excluded from Jin Ye is Blood, because it is considered essential enough to deserve its own category.

Blood (Xue)

In TCM, blood includes the physical manifestation of the blood that flows through the vessels to nourish all the organs and tissues of the body. Xue (pronounced "shway") does all this, plus contains the Shen. Blood and Qi are interdependent, as blood nourishes Qi and Qi moves blood. A person

can be diagnosed as "Blood deficient" by TCM standards without being anemic. They may have some common anemia signs, like paleness, fatigue, dizziness, light-headedness, insomnia, trouble focusing, headaches, feeling cold, and tingling sensations, but conventional blood tests may come back normal. Because of this difference from the usual understanding of physical blood, the TCM version will be capitalized and written as "Blood."

Additionally, someone diagnosed with "Blood stagnation/stasis" doesn't mean they have a blood clot. They are likely, however, to have one or more of the symptoms of stabbing fixed pain; purple-tinged tongue, nails, or lips; fixed masses like cysts, fibroids, lumps, or tumors; bleeding with dark blood or blood clots, often seen with menstrual cycles, particularly for patients with PCOS, dysmenorrhea, or other painful menstrual issue; purplish or bluish skin discolorations such as varicose veins, spider veins, and spots on the skin; and rough and scaly dry skin.

Because herbs, foods, and acupuncture points each address these vital substances differently, to choose a treatment prescription, practitioners must know which substances are most affected. For example, the herb chen pi *(Pericarpium citri reticulatae)* is used to move Qi to treat symptoms like abdominal bloating or nausea, but it cannot treat a Blood issue like amenorrhea or subcutaneous bleeding like the herb dan shen *(Radix salviae miltiorrhizae)*.

While it may be difficult for non-TCM practitioners to employ a basic understanding of these terms in practice, it does allow for a foundational comprehension of a TCM diagnosis.

TCM Organs

Before we can begin discussing the core philosophies and principles, we must start by reviewing the organ systems and principal meridians, which are key to understanding how a TCM practitioner views the human body.

In TCM, though the names of physical organs are used, the actual meaning is broader than the physical in-body organs defined by modern anatomy and physiology. For this reason, the TCM version of the organs will be capitalized to differentiate them from the physical ones.

There are 12 main TCM organs, and of those, half of them are Yin (called Zang) and half Yang (called Fu). Five of these pairs are associated with one element from nature.

Zang Fu Organs and Their Associated Element

ZANG ORGAN	FU ORGAN	ELEMENT
Spleen	Stomach	Earth
Lungs	Large Intestines	Metal
Kidneys	Urinary Bladder	Water
Liver	Gallbladder	Wood
Heart	Small Intestines	Fire
Pericardium	San Jiao (Triple Warmer)	

Zang Organs

For the purposes of this e-resource, the focus will be on the Zang organs, which are more solid in nature, have more functions, and are generally involved in the transformation and storage of vital substances, Qi, Blood, Jing, Shen, and Jin Ye. The Fu organs are hollow and generally only temporarily store and transport partially transformed substances or waste products.

Please keep in mind, when studying TCM, organs and meridians are considered much more advanced, but for the purposes of this e-resource, we offer this introduction to help illustrate the concepts discussed.

Spleen

The Spleen is sometimes called the Spleen-Pancreas or Pancreas-Spleen, in recognition of its close relationship to functions of the physical pancreas. It is most important in its ability to process both food and thoughts.

The TCM Spleen:

- Regulates transformation and transportation of nutrients and water
- Keeps blood in the blood vessels; easily bruising or bleeding demonstrate weakness
- Lifts Qi, keeps organs from prolapsing, and ascends nutrition
- Controls the muscles
- Processes thoughts and is involved in concentration, focus, short-term memory, planning, organization, and is prone to overthinking and worry
- Manifests in the lips
- Opens in the mouth
- Connects to the Stomach

Lungs

The Lungs are involved in respiration, as are the lungs. The TCM version, however, is closely connected to the immune system.

The TCM Lungs:

- Control Qi by moving energy around the body, including the process of respiration
- Regulate water movement and assisting in moving out excess water in the form of exhalation, perspiration, and urination
- Influence the voice
- Relate to the immune system by circulating "defensive Qi" at the surfaces of the body

- Manifest on the skin and body hair
- Open in the nose
- Present sadness, grief, and is involved in the process of "letting go"
- Connects to the Large Intestines

Kidneys

The Kidneys are much more than filtration organs in TCM. They are the storage place for our constitutional energies, what we are born with, sharing some similarities to DNA and genes. They are also held responsible for many of the functions of the adrenal glands.

The TCM Kidneys:

- Store Jing, our congenital energy
- Rule growth, development, and reproduction
- Control water metabolism
- Receive Qi from the Lungs and help with inspiration
- Produce marrow and relate in TCM to the brain
- Manifest in the bones and joints
- Open in the ears
- Manage fear
- Connect to the Urinary Bladder

Liver

The Liver is a regulator of Qi movement and cyclic rhythms, hormonal and circadian. It can have a dominating influence on other organs when it is imbalanced, most often affecting the Spleen and negatively impacting digestion and clear thinking.

The TCM Liver:

- Controls the flow of Qi, thus impacting the body's ability to move blood, regulate emotions, and digest food
- Stores the Blood
- Produces bile
- Manifests in the nails

Movement of Qi with Emotions

EMOTION	MOVEMENT OF QI
Happy	Qi moves up
Angry	Qi moves up and out
Sad	Qi moves down
Scared	Qi moves down and in
Worried	Qi stagnates

- Reflects in the tendons and ligaments
- Opens in the eyes
- Rules anger
- Connects to the Gallbladder

Heart

The Heart is considered the king organ. In times of deficit, all the other organs must donate their energies to the Heart so it can continue to keep us alive. TCM discusses two Hearts, a physical one and an emotional one, as it both pumps blood to the whole of the body and houses all the emotions.

The TCM Heart:

- Controls the blood and vessels, pumping blood to the rest of the body
- Manages the mental activities of consciousness and procedural memory or motor memory
- Regulates sweat
- Houses Shen and all emotions
- Manifests in the complexion
- Opens in the tongue
- Produces joy
- Connects with the Small Intestines

Pericardium

The Pericardium is like a bodyguard to the Heart. It has the same function of the double-walled physical sac, also called the pericardium, protecting the heart from infection and containing a small amount of fluid that acts as a lubricant to allow for the heart to move.

The Pericardium:

- Connects with the Triple Warmer or San Jiao

San Jiao

This TCM organ does not have a physical organ to correlate. Translated as the Triple Warmer, Triple Burner, or the Triple Energizer, the San Jiao acts as an avenue and a conductor for Qi to move and communicate between three regions of the body, upper, middle, and lower.

The Upper Jiao refers to the diaphragm up and consists of the Heart, Lungs, and Pericardium. The Middle Jiao is between the diaphragm and the umbilicus, containing the Stomach, Spleen, Liver, and Gallbladder. The Lower Jiao is below the umbilicus, holding the Small Intestines, Large Intestines, Kidneys, and Urinary Bladder.

The San Jiao is considered a Yang organ that some now think may have connection to the lymphatic system or the interstitium, a newly-recognized network of fluid-filled spaces, termed by one of the co-researchers who recently discovered it, Neil Theise, MD, a professor of pathology, as being like an "open, fluid-filled highway."

TCM Meridians

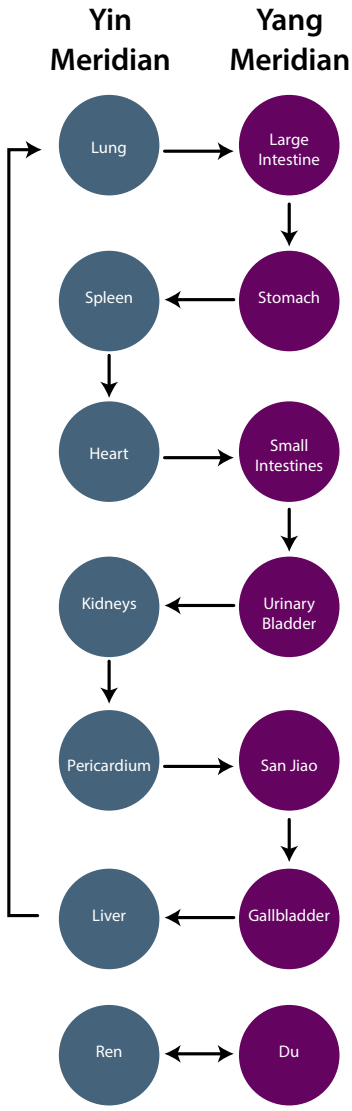
There are 14 main meridians, sometimes called channels, that have associated points along them. Twelve of these meridians, those associated with the TCM organs, join into the next, so they are a continuous loop. Two of these meridians, called Du (Governing) and Ren (Conception) meridians, connect with each other and are termed extraordinary

meridians, as they are not associated directly with organs.

There are six more extraordinary meridians that do not have their own points, but are affected by points along the main meridians:

- Chong (Penetrating)
- Yinwei (Yin Linking)
- Yangwei (Yang Linking)
- Yinqiao (Yin Heel)
- Yangqiao (Yang Heel)
- Dai (Belt)

Additionally, while most people think of the main meridians that form the backbone



of the system, there are also innumerate branching collateral channels connecting everything in between:

- Connecting collaterals
- Divergent collaterals
- Muscle collaterals
- Skin collaterals

Just as there are a multitude of smaller, interlinking nerves and blood vessels joining the main, larger ones, there a vast number of meridians, showing how interconnected and complex the body is.

Five Elements

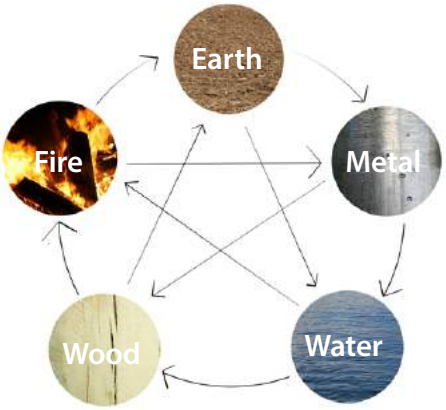
The Five Elements, or Five Phases, are aspects of Qi, and are used to define patterns of imbalances within the body. They include:

1. Fire
2. Water
3. Metal
4. Wood
5. Earth

Optimal health is considered a harmonious balance of all the elements. The Qi of elements fluctuates in daily and seasonal cycles. Every individual is a unique blend of characteristics from all elements.

Each of the five elements is assigned two TCM organs, as described above. They are assigned names to help understand patterns of symptoms and imbalances. Therefore, when a TCM practitioner states that a patient has Heart Fire, it doesn't mean heartburn or that the physical heart is overheated. Instead, this patient is likely struggling with insomnia, anxiety, or possibly canker sores or urinary tract infections. Having Spleen Qi deficiency does not mean that the physical spleen is not getting enough energy, but this patient may be tired, foggy-headed, bloated, or bruising easily.

As previously mentioned, to distinguish the physical organs from the TCM version of the organs, the latter is often capitalized. Thus, the Earth element relates to the Spleen and Stomach, Metal is associated



with the Lungs and Large Intestines, Water connects to the Kidneys and Urinary Bladder, Wood links to the Liver and Gallbladder, and Fire links to the Heart and Small Intestines.

Fire

The Fire element is correlated with the Heart and Small Intestines. The Heart is considered king or emperor, the most essential organ and leader of the body.

The Heart directs the blood and commands the blood vessels. The Heart is responsible to making sure that Blood circulates and nourishes all the organs and tissues of the body. When it does not, a person may suffer from poor circulation, feeling cold, fatigue, light-headedness, numbness, tingling, dizziness, headache, skin conditions, insomnia, weakness, tissue atrophy, heart attack, and stroke.

The TCM Heart is also deeply interwoven with the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health as it stores the Shen. Every TCM organ is said to oversee one dominant emotion. The Heart's primary emotion is joy, but it also houses all the other emotions.

Feel yourself sitting near a fire. It can be warm and comforting, drawing you in closer. Or, it can be unpredictable and fierce in its capacity to burn. Those with a lot of Fire energy are passionate and dramatic, and they are often the charismatic life

of the party whom everyone wants to meet. Intensely heart-centered, they are generally excellent speakers, firing people up with their energy and enthusiasm. Fire people are romantics, chasing pleasure and stimulation, and they usually don't like to be alone.

The most affected organs of a Fire type are the heart and the small intestines. Fire types are more prone to heart attacks, heart failure, strokes, aneurysm, heartbeat irregularities, coronary heart disease, deep vein thrombosis, atherosclerosis, arteriosclerosis, palpitations, varicose veins, hemorrhoids, and all issues having to do with the cardiovascular system. Related to the small intestines, Fire individuals may also suffer from digestive issues. Because fire is hot, those with a lot of fire in their system or personality may struggle with inflammation, red skin rashes, canker sores and other ulcerated sores, and a tendency to overheat.

Limiting exposure to hot temperatures, hot foods, and hot tempers can help bring better balance. Emotionally, Fire folks are generally joyful and happy when things are good, but they may find themselves feeling anxious and struggling with manic behavior or insomnia when not doing well. When Fire is weak, a person can feel depressed, cold, weak, or scattered.

Fire people can benefit from the following:

- Spend time with loved ones, but also seek time alone, nurturing love of self, independence, and self-confidence.
- Practice the sound of the Heart, laughter.
- Limit or avoid stimulants like caffeine.
- Incorporate structure into daily routine to counter the tendencies to become too impulsive or scattered.
- Eat bitter foods like dark leafy greens, artichoke, barley, and dill.
- Do some heart-pumping exercises as well as calm, slow moving exercises.

Earth

The Earth element is connected to the Spleen and Stomach.

The Spleen in TCM is sometimes called the Spleen/Pancreas because many of its functions are more linked to the physical pancreas than the physical spleen. As the Official of Processing and Transportation, the Spleen's primary function is to take the consumed food and drink and transform it into useable energy. The physical pancreas achieves this through the secretion of digestive enzymes that help break apart ingested substances. The Spleen then makes sure that the substance is transported to the correct destination.

In its title of processing, it manages not just food, but also thoughts. It influences our ability to think, study, and concentrate, but when it becomes overly empowered, the Spleen causes worry and overthinking to predominate.

Think of a garden full of vegetables. The soil makes you feel grounded, while the veggies will nourish you. Those with a lot of Earth element are the caregivers, the mother hens, and the peacekeepers. They can readily adapt to most situations, molding their approach and style of communication to their environment. Dependable and sympathetic, they are the go-to person when you need support or help.

Relationships are key to Earth types and they are bothered by disharmony between others, so they may try to be mediate the conflict whether they are asked to or not. Earth people spend a lot of time ruminating over just about everything.

The Stomach and Spleen are the organs most affected for Earth people. Thus, when things go off kilter, digestive symptoms can occur, including nausea, heartburn, indigestion, bloating, belching, flatulence, abdominal or stomach pain, diarrhea, constipation, and excessive or poor appetite.

Sweet is the flavor-of-choice for Earth people, so problems with blood sugar regulation can occur, including diabetes, hypoglycemia, cravings, and problems with weight management.

Disruption of the Spleen and Stomach energy causes problems with concentration, poor memory, worry, overthinking, and anxiety. The Spleen also has a lifting action, making sure that the organs hold their positions, resisting gravity. Prolapsed organs can at least partially fault Spleen weakness. The Spleen is said to help with keeping the blood in the blood vessels, so easy bruising or heavy bleeding are further signs of energy deficiency here. Additionally, the Spleen controls the muscles, so muscle cramps, tension, sprains, strains, and weakness are sometimes Earth issues.

Earth weakness can cause fatigue and Damp symptoms in the body, like foggy-headedness, feeling weighted down, bloating, diarrhea, and puffiness.

Earth people can benefit from the following:

- Practice self-care by getting enough sleep, saying "no" on occasion to allow time for self, eating healthy, meditating, getting therapeutic treatments, and asking for and accepting help.
- Get in touch with the earth, such as soil, land, and dirt. Garden, walk barefoot outside, or use visualization to picture connecting to the earth.
- Spend some daily time being present. Worriers, by definition, spend too much time thinking about the future or the past.
- Chew food well and focus when eating, not multitasking.

- Let loose with the sound of the Spleen by singing.
- Eat easily digested foods like soups, stews, and slow cooked meals. Include root vegetables and fermented foods.
- Limit sugars and processed foods.

Metal

The Metal element resonates with the Lungs and Large Intestines.

The Lungs are the Prime Minister. They have the key function of "governing Qi and respiration" and, as such, are in charge of taking in air and using this to help create other essential types of Qi. As they preside over Qi, and because of their proximity to the Heart, the Lungs help move Qi to the rest of the body.

At the same time, however, they are termed the "delicate organ. "This is because they are the internal organ most exposed to the external world. While the outside has access to the stomach via the mouth and esophagus, the stomach has a powerful acid to kill off damaging pathogens. The lungs, on the other hand, have only mucus and little hairs, and they continuously take in the outside world via breathing in through the nose and mouth.

The Lungs help manage the defensive system by controlling the circulation of Wei Qi, or defensive energy. The most common cold symptoms, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, and coughing, all affect entry points to the Lungs.

Metal types tend to be strongly-opinioned perfectionists, but they are also methodical problem solvers. They hold very strong values and morals and are often willing to come forward like a knight in shining armor, sometimes using their sharp wit, to protect those ideas and people they are loyal to. Metal individuals may sometimes come across as cool and calculated, but they might in fact be quite sensitive.

The most challenged organs of a Metal person are the lungs and the large intestines. Asthma, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchitis, and pneumonia are common issues related to the lungs. The immune system is closely associated with the Lungs, so Metal types are more prone to issues with catching colds often or with an overactive immune system causing autoimmune disorders like allergies, lupus, scleroderma, Sjögren disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis.

In TCM, the Lungs are associated with the skin, so skin conditions also fit this category, including sensitive skin, eczema, psoriasis, rosacea, acne, and many other forms of dermatitis. Intestinal disorders that may occur here include general issues with constipation or diarrhea, but also inflammatory bowel diseases like Crohn's and ulcerative colitis, as well as diverticulitis and colonic polyps. It's also common to see the emotions of grief and sadness, sometimes somewhat hidden and suppressed, come into play here.

Weakness in the Metal element can lead to breathing problems, a chronic cough, problems with the bowels, and deep sadness or feeling of loss.

Metal people can benefit from the following:

- Let go of those things that are no longer of service, including stuff, ideas, beliefs, habits, routines, and perhaps people. If the individual's tendency is the opposite and they have a hard time holding on, the reverse is true.
- Watch for a tendency for being over-judgmental and righteous.
- Practice conscious, slow, deep breathing.
- Get fresh air and enjoy some activity outdoors.
- Go for a walk or move around after eating to help support healthy bowel movements.
- Mushrooms are a great Metal element food, as they support a healthy immune system. Garlic, onions, and moderate amounts of other pungent foods and spices work, too.

Water

The Water element is related to the Kidneys and Urinary Bladder.

The Kidneys are like the central bank. They are the place where our constitutional energies and essence (Jing) from all the organs are stored. The energies housed here support development and growth, but decline as we age. Though a decline in all the energies is associated with aging, the Kidneys have the biggest impact. They are sometimes referred to as the "root of life."

The Kidneys produce marrow, the common substance of bones, bone marrow, the brain, and the spinal cord, and are necessary for the formation of sperm and eggs.

As the Kidneys are a water organ, both in the sense of their TCM element and that they remove excess water and waste in the form of urine, they are said to govern water and the water passageways.

Water people are determined and powerful, but also secretive and introverted. You may not always see their power and their might, but water can wear down rock. Despite this, they tend to have several fears. Because of their ability to be self-reflective, curious, and comfortably spend time on their own, they are often great creatives. For this reason, they are sometimes poorly understood because they seem mysterious or even eccentric, but they may like being an enigma and thrive on being different.

The Water element organs are the kidneys and urinary bladder, so common symptoms include frequent urinary tract infections, cystitis, bladder or kidney stones, incontinence, and overactive bladder. Prostate issues, low libido, and infertility are other possible Water issues. Because teeth, bones, and joints fit this category, tooth issues, osteoporosis, osteopenia, bone pain, arthritis, joint pain, and particularly low back, knee,

ankle, or foot pain are potential problems.

The sense organ connected to Water is the ears, so signs in this category include frequent ear infections, hearing problems, and tinnitus. Because of their connection to the Heart and their importance in regulating salt and body fluids, the Kidneys' imbalance can affect the blood pressure. Other physical symptoms include shortness of breath, poor long-term memory, swelling, edema, premature hair greying, hair loss or thinning, adrenal issues, and dark circles under the eyes.

When the Water element is weak, low back or joint pain, urinary tract issues, and adrenal fatigue may occur, along with an increase in fear and anxiety that can cause a person to feel isolated.

Water people can benefit from the following:

- Work on balancing a healthy dose of fear with trust and boldness.
- Avoid becoming too isolated.
- Drink plenty of clean water.
- Do weight-bearing exercise to strengthen bones.
- Protect the ears from too much noise.
- Get enough sleep and calm your nervous system when you get overwhelmed, fearful, anxious, or stressed.
- Moderate salt intake.
- Eat unsalted nuts and seeds, legumes, soups, fish, and watery foods like melons.

Wood

The Wood element links to the Liver and Gallbladder.

The Liver is like a military general, controlling the flow of Qi, making sure that it moves smoothly, in all directions through the body. This helps it promote digestion, regulate the movement of Blood, and soothe emotions. It controls the tendons and ligaments, regulates menstruation, and affects the eyes.

When the body is at rest, Blood is stored in the Liver. During activity, the Liver sends Blood to the muscles. Physically, this can be equated to the physical liver's function of storing energy in the form of glycogen and releasing it when needed during activity.

Just like its physical counterpart, the TCM Liver has also been credited with producing bile that aids digestion and is stored in the Gallbladder.

Visualize a tree, strong and determined to grow, even on top of a rock or through cement. This is the power of the Wood element. These people are classified as type A, driven, decisive, loving challenges, taking charge, and doing well under pressure. They can make powerful, but sometimes overwhelming, leaders. They can also be quite stubborn, hate giving up control, and finding it hard to believe anyone else can do the job to their satisfaction.

Physically, Wood-dominant people are prone to problems with the liver and gallbladder, so they should avoid or limit their exposure to toxins, and they should watch their use of substances like alcohol, drugs, caffeine, and cigarettes, as they may tend to use these things to help them push farther or to calm their nerves.

Tending to have tight muscles, they may suffer

TCM Elements and Their Associated Characteristics and Relationships

TCM ELEMENT	VISCERA ORGAN	BOWEL ORGAN	BODY TISSUE	SENSE ORGAN	EMOTION	SOUND	SEASON	FLAVOR
Wood	Liver	Gallbladder	Sinews	Eyes	Anger	Shouting	Spring	Sour
Fire	Heart	Small Intestine	Vessels	Tongue	Joy	Laughter	Summer	Bitter
Earth	Spleen	Stomach	Muscles	Mouth	Thought	Singing	Late Summer/ Transition Between Seasons	Sweet
Metal	Lungs	Large Intestine	Skin	Nose	Sorrow	Crying	Fall	Pungent/ Spicy
Water	Kidney	Urinary Bladder	Bone	Ears	Fear	Moaning	Winter	Salty

from tension headaches, grinding or clenching jaw pain, muscle pain, and muscle twitches or cramps. Regular stretching can be helpful.

A tree is strongest when it has some flexibility to move with the wind. One of the most common TCM diagnoses is Liver Qi stagnation, often in combination with other patterns, and symptoms include hypochondriac or costal pain, a feeling of oppression in the chest, pain or discomfort in the breasts or groin, or "plum pit Qi," a feeling as if there is a plum pit stuck in the throat.

Wood people can also suffer from digestive issues, especially when stressed. The natural element of Wind is associated with Wood, so symptoms of dizziness, vertigo, ringing in the ears, stroke, Bell's palsy, tremors, tics, and aversion to wind may occur. Additionally, the Wood element follows routine and order, so abnormal signs that occur with regularity or the loss of routine signal a disruption in this element.

Conversely, when Wood is weak or stuck, indecisiveness, wishy-washiness, and depression, often with feelings of frustration, irritability, and anger, can occur.

Wood people can benefit from the following:

- Loosen the reins of control or take the reins if the tendency is toward weakness in this element.
- Balance strength with flexibility, both in personality and in physicality. Be like a strong, powerful tree that bends and yields appropriately so you don't break.
- Create regular stress relief routines.
- Stretch, especially the side body.
- Make sure to protect your eyes from becoming dry and irritated, as can be caused by spending too much time at the computer, staring at your phone, or from exposure to wind or other irritants.
- Avoid or limit stimulants and intoxicants.
- Consider periodic cleanses and clean eating, especially during the spring season.
- Eat plenty of cruciferous vegetables, dandelion greens and other leafy vegetables, sprouted foods, and fermented foods.

Six Pathogenic Factors

Sometimes called the Six Evils or Six Excesses, these are based on the characteristics of external environmental factors:

1. Wind
2. Heat
3. Cold
4. Damp
5. Dry
6. Summer-Heat

By understanding these, a practitioner can better make recommendations on how to avoid illness and treat those symptoms that do arise. These pathogenic factors are said to arise from exposure to the external element. For example, being too hot can cause red face, sweating, and irritability. However, they can also be generated internally through improper diet, poor lifestyle choices, emotions, or organ pathologies. Each pathogenic factor is connected to a TCM organ pair and a season.

Wind

Wind is said to be the carrier of other pathogens into the body. The weather element of wind causes things to move and sway, affects predominantly the higher part of trees and buildings, and can be hot, cold, dry, or carry rain and moisture. It also increases the intensity of a fire and is subject to abrupt changes. In a similar vein, in the body, it can cause:

- Tremors, shaking, spasms, and dizziness
- Headaches, sneezing, and stuffy or runny nose
- Stroke, Bell's palsy, or other paralytic disease
- Pain or symptoms that vary or move to different areas of the body
- Itchiness
- Cold or flu symptoms, when combined with other pathogenic factors

Wind-Heat causes a cold with sore throat and fever. Wind-Cold causes a cold with body aches, headaches, and runny nose. One recommendation to avoid Wind's influence include to dress appropriately warm and covered and wear a scarf or hat if it is windy out.

Heat

As one might imagine, the pathogenic Heat factor is associated with sensations of heat. When it becomes intense, it is called Fire. Heat or Fire can occur because of constitutional tendencies; external exposure to heat; when Wind is excessive and stirs up the fire; when there is stagnancy of Qi or Blood;

Pathogenic Factors and Their Associated TCM Organ and Season

PATHOGENIC FACTOR	ORGAN	SEASON
Wind	Liver and Gallbladder	Spring
Heat and Summer-Heat	Heart and Small Intestines	Summer
Damp	Spleen and Stomach	Late Summer (and time between main seasons)
Dry	Lungs and Large Intestines	Fall
Cold	Kidneys and Urinary Bladder	Winter

deficiency of Blood or Yin and their cooling and nourishing natures; with excessive emotions, particularly anger; or overindulgence of food or alcohol. It can also combine Wind or Damp or cause the Dry pathogenic factor to become a problem as it burns and dries moisture.

Heat in the body cause result in:

- Sensations of heat
- Redness in the face, skin, eyes, or tongue
- Inflammation
- Irritation of tissues, such as red rashes, sores, or ulcers
- Sweating excessively
- Anger and irritability

To steer clear of the Heat pathogen, do not let the body overheat, balance the body's excess Heat with cooling foods such as cucumber, mint, watermelon, zucchini, dill, tofu, and green tea, drink plenty of fluids, avoid excessive eating or drinking alcohol, and manage anger.

Summer-Heat

Summer-Heat is essentially heat stroke or sun stroke. It occurs with excessive exposure to heat or sun and causes:

- Feeling hot
- Profuse sweating, which may stop despite the heat
- Rapid heartbeat or palpitations
- Rapid and shallow breathing
- Parched mouth and throat
- Light-headedness
- Headache
- Constipation
- Vomiting, abdominal pains, and intestinal spasms when it combines with Dampness

The simple solution to dodging Summer-Heat is to avoid getting a sun or heat stroke by cooling off appropriately in the summer, hydrating well, staying in the shade, and watching not to overheat.

Dry

The Dry pathogen most easily affects and damages the Lungs. It can be caused by excess Heat, insufficient hydration, Yin deficiency, or loss of fluids from too much sweating, diarrhea, vomiting, or bleeding.

Dry symptoms include:

- Dry skin, hair, lips, nose, throat, or mouth
- Dry cough
- Chest pain, blood in the sputum
- Constipation or hard, dry stools
- Vaginal dryness

Dry pathogenic factors can be avoided through proper hydration, nourishing the Blood with herbs like dang gui *(Radix angelicae sinensis)* or he shou wu *(Radix polygoni multiflori)*, and tonifying Yin with herbs like nu zhen zi *(Fructus ligustri lucidi)* or xi yang shen *(Radix panacis quinquifolii)*.

Damp

While moisture is essential to life, too much causes Dampness that creates sluggishness and impedes organ function. Dampness can be caused by a damp climate, Spleen Qi deficiency, Yang deficiency, worry and overthinking, drinking too much alcohol, and eating too many cold, raw, or greasy foods. Damp-Heat is often associated with acne, eczema, carbuncles, and other dermatologic conditions, though it is not the only pattern.

Damp symptoms include:

- Fatigue and lethargy
- Swelling, edema
- Dull, achy, heavy pain in joints, muscles, head, chest, or abdomen
- Phlegm
- Bloating, diarrhea, sluggish digestion
- Many types of skin conditions, particularly if they seep fluids or contain pus
- Candida, digestive or vaginal

One might think that one counter to the Damp pathogen is to limit fluids, but it's still essential to hydrate sufficiently. Instead, limit or avoid sugary, processed, or greasy foods. Cold and raw foods should also be limited, as they are harder to digest and weaken the Spleen Qi. Soups, stews, and slow-cooked meals are usually recommended.

Cold

Cold contracts, while heat expands. This simple principle of physics explains why cold impairs movement of Qi and Blood and can cause cramping and pain. Cold can enter the body by exposure to a cold environment, Yang deficiency, or eating too many raw or cold foods like tofu, tomato, and celery. Cold results in:

- Sensation of cold, shivering, chills
- Poor circulation causing cold hands and feet
- Severe cramping pain in the joints, muscles, head, chest, or abdomen
- Poor digestion with nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, or pain
- Infertility

Warming herbs and spices like ginger, cinnamon, and cardamom can help dispel the Cold pathogen, as can eating warm, cooked foods. Sufficient movement and exercise, heating pads, and warm clothing can also dispel Cold.

Putting it All Together

One of the first steps to understanding TCM is to learn its language. Now that you have a basic glossary of TCM terms, you can start to see how a TCM practitioner puts them together to form a diagnosis. Note that like any language, it takes years of study and practice to effectively assess most patients with a TCM diagnosis. This is, in part, because TCM is a complex, complete system, and most patients have a complex array of symptoms and patterns often accumulated and compounded over years.

DIAGNOSES »

Since the goal of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is to not only treat the symptoms of illness, but the root cause, before prescribing any herbs, administering any needle, or recommending any food, a practitioner must know what comprises a TCM diagnosis.

The development of TCM long pre-dated the technology-driven tools we have today, and therefore it historically relied on observational cues. Diagnosis cannot be made from one single observation or cue. Instead, assessment compiles many different clues, some of which will be covered below.

A TCM diagnosis involves an assessment of the person's physical, emotional, and spiritual state using the eight guiding principles to identify imbalances, identifying which organs and the aspect of each organ that are most affected, including Qi, Blood, Jing, Shen, or body fluids, and understanding environmental elements that may have an impact, including Wind, Heat, Cold, Damp, Dry, or a pathogen.

Today, patients generally only seek healthcare when they feel unwell, but there is usually more than one pattern of imbalance present. For example, a patient who has a sore throat and mild fever indicating a viral cold, but who tends to get sick easily, has asthma, weak digestion with bloating and soft stools, and feels tired and foggy-headed, may receive a TCM diagnosis of acute superficial/external Wind-Heat with chronic internal Lung Qi deficiency and Spleen Qi deficiency Dampness.

Looking

There is a lot of information we can take in from a patient's visual cues. TCM assigns each organ system a color, so when a hint of that color is seen on the tongue, in the complexion, or on the skin, it may reflect an issue with its assigned organ. Color is also used to signal heat (red), cold (pale or bluish), stagnation (Blood stagnation is bluish or purplish), or deficiency (paleness), so there are multiple aspects to consider when it comes to this visual tool.

Each organ is related to a color:

- White or pale: Lungs and Large Intestines
- Blue or black: Kidneys and Urinary Bladder
- Green: Liver or Gallbladder
- Red: Heart or Small Intestines
- Yellow or orange: Spleen and Stomach

Because there is so much information that can be acquired through looking, it's worth meeting a patient in the waiting room to briefly observe them as you welcome them:

- How is their sitting posture?
- What is their demeanor?

Sometimes patients are less guarded when they aren't the center of attention, so some insight may be gained even before the session starts:

- How is their mobility as they stand and walk?
- Do they grimace, favor a side, or limb, limp, walk slow, have problems rotating the head, have a head tilt, or any other noticeable anomaly?

Even if the person isn't coming in for something musculoskeletal, it's possible that information gathered from their movement may help guide diagnosis and treatment.

While taking information about the patient and their chief complaints, we can observe the patient's face to help determine areas of constitutional strength or weakness, which can help us focus our diagnostic questions and make suggestions for customized wellness care. Though everyone's skin color is different, complexion color can reflect health conditions. TCM literature specifically states the, "Heart manifests in the complexion."

Regardless of whether someone is pale or dark-skinned, a bit of rosiness reflects healthy circulation and Heart. Smokers, diabetics, and people with heart disease tend to have fewer blood vessels in their skin, leaving their complexion less rosy. A dull, pale face reflects deficiency in Blood. Bluish or purplish hues indicate Heart Blood stagnation. A red complexion can indicate Heat in the body.

Other organs may also display their distress in the hues of the face. It is well-known that jaundice signals liver issues, and other color signs, like

malar flush, butterfly rash, or a red-tipped nose, can point to specific Western medicine diagnoses worth recognizing.

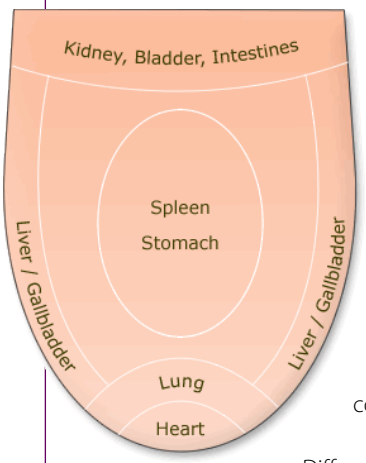
Is the complexion clear or are there pimples, rashes, markings, or scars? It may be helpful to see if any markings seem to relate to any meridians or channels.

The saying that the eyes are the windows to the soul is also reflected in the TCM assessment that Shen, or spirit, can be observed through the eyes. Different organs can also deliver their information via the eyes, though they only offer one piece of information and the diagnosis may be more complex.

In addition, the eyes, in general, relate to the TCM Liver. The sclera reflects the Lungs, the iris links to the Liver, the pupil connects to the Kidneys, the flesh around the eyes relates to the Spleen, and the inner and outer canthus correlates with the Heart. If a patient's whites of their eyes look red, a TCM practitioner would consider if there is Heat in the Lungs or if it is Liver Heat. Of course, if the eye whites are yellowish, the Liver should be considered too, as that is a sign of jaundice. If there are bags under the eyes, the TCM diagnosis may include Spleen Qi deficiency Dampness. However, dark circles under the eyes may also indicate Kidney deficiency.

Tongue Diagnosis

One of the most unique aspects of TCM diagnosis is tongue diagnosis. The size, shape, moisture, color, markings, and coating of the tongue are all assessed. A "normal" tongue should be pink or light red, appropriately sized, moist, and have a thin white coat. The tongue coating is partially a reflection of the digestive process of the stomach, and assists in the diagnosis, so patients are asked not to brush their tongue prior to a TCM consultation.



When doing a tongue diagnosis, it is best to do so with a natural light source, or at least use a consistent and bright light source when comparing. The tongue should also be stuck out far enough to see, but still be relaxed and not left out too long, as that changes its moisture and possibly color. Certain foods, like coffee, tea, berries, and candy, as well as some medications, can change the color of the coating of the tongue.

Different areas of the tongue reflect different organs of the body. The very back of the tongue relates to the Kidneys and Urinary Bladder, in front of that to the Large and Small Intestines, the middle to the Spleen and Stomach, the front to the Lungs, the tip to the Heart, and the sides to the Liver and Gallbladder. Thus, depending on where a color, coating, or marking is noted, a practitioner can deduce that the issue is predominantly at the associated organ.

While doing tongue diagnosis does take practice, some simple observations can be made to see if there are signs of:

- Heat: Red or dry tongue body; no coat or yellow coat
- Cold: Pale or bluish tongue body
- Dampness: Swollen, teeth marks, thick coat, sticky coat
- Dryness: Dry tongue, no coat
- Qi deficiency: Pale or thin tongue body, teeth marks
- Blood deficiency: Pale tongue body
- Qi stagnation: Red tip (Heart) or sides (Liver)
- Blood stagnation: Purplish tongue body; enlarged blood vessels under tongue
- Yang deficiency: Pale and swollen tongue body; thick white coat or overly moist
- Yin deficiency: Red, dry, and thin tongue body; no or little coat; cracks on the tongue

Listening

Of course, it's important to listen to the things a patient says, but it's equally important to listen to the tone, strength, speed, and volume of the voice. A loud voice indicates excess, while a quiet voice signals deficiency. A hoarse voice generally indicates an issue with the Lungs, while a shouting voice tends to point to excess Liver patterns.
If a patient is coughing, the practitioner does not necessarily need a stethoscope to diagnosis the Lung pattern. A rattling or wheezing sound indicates phlegm in the Lung, a very loud cough points to excess, a weak cough is indicative of deficiency, and a dry hacking cough usually signals Dry-Heat in the Lungs.

A patient who is sighing a lot may be having a rough day or this may be a regular habit, but regardless indicates Liver Qi stagnation, which may also show up with other clues like a tendency to frustration, irritation, or anger; jaw tension or TMJ syndrome; migraines; temporal, or vertex headaches; tendonitis; digestive issues like bloating or bowel irregularities; cold hands and feet; depression; and hormonal imbalance.

Smelling

This diagnostic tool is much less useful now than it used to be, though perhaps thankfully so, as we tend to bathe more often. It is further complicated by the various scents that people add in the form of deodorants, creams, perfumes, colognes, or essential oils.

It can be useful, however, to note things like whether the patient smells like cigarette or marijuana smoke, alcohol, or body odor to help with an impression of lifestyle choices or health issues. Patients can also be asked if they've noticed any personal odors.

- Chronic halitosis or bad breath points to a TCM diagnosis of Stomach Heat

- Foul smelling gas or stools indicated Damp-Heat in the Large Intestines
- Foul or sour smelling belches signals food stagnation and poor digestion
- Strong odor from leukorrhea signifies Damp-Heat in the Lower Jiao

Feeling

Manual therapists, including acupuncturists, massage therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, and osteopaths regularly have an opportunity to feel for diagnosis, as they use palpation as part of their treatments. These therapists may establish if the skin warm or cold, dry or moist; if the tissue underneath is firm or soft; and where areas of tension or weakness exist.

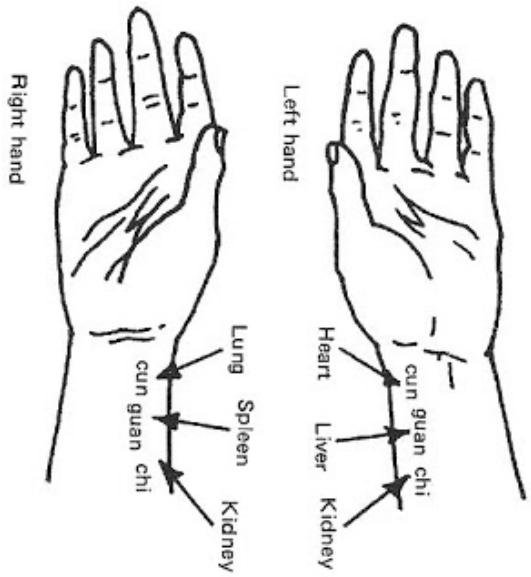
Pulse Diagnosis

Another TCM-specific diagnostic tool is pulse diagnosis. The radial pulse of the patient is felt with the index, middle, and ring fingers, all laid side-by-side to feel three different locations along the vessel. The starting point for the finger closest to the wrist is at the wrist crease, the most distal fold in the skin when the wrist is flexed. The pulse is felt at three different depths:

- Superficial
- Medium
- Deep

The radial pulses are felt on each wrist because different organs are represented at each pulse location.

Though some pulses can be relatively easily understood, such as deep, weak, slow, or rapid, other pulses such as scattered or tympanic are more challenging to feel and take years of practice to learn. Some of the



TCM Pulse Diagnosis Names

Pulse (Chinese name)	Pulse (English translation)
Fu	Floating, superficial
Chen	Deep
Hong	Flooding, surging
Ru	Soft, soggy
Ge	Tympanic, drumskin
Kou	Hollow
Shi	Excess
Ruo	Weak
Lao	Firm
Huan	Relaxed
Chang	Long
Duan	Short
Hua	Slippery
Se	Choppy
Jie	Knotted
Xi	Thready
Jin	Tight
Wei	Faint
Xuan	Wiry
San	Scattered
Da	Large
Fu (a different character)	Hidden
Shuo	Rapid
Ji	Racing
Chi	Slow
Dong	Stirring
Xu	Empty
Cu	Skipping
Dai	Regularly irregular

pulse sensation descriptions are somewhat poetic. For example, slippery is described as a pearl rolling on a plate, while choppy is like running the back of a comb along a stalk of bamboo, and hollow feels like a green onion. In fact, there are more than two dozen possible pulses.

Some practitioners do not ask many, or any, questions when diagnosing a patient, using only their observations, including looking at the tongue and feeling the pulse for their assessment. Personally, I find a lot of value in asking questions, as it's an opportunity to gather more information, create rapport, build trust, and potentially counsel on lifestyle recommendations. I use tongue and pulse diagnosis to help me confirm my TCM diagnosis or cue me to ask more questions. There are times that the tongue and pulse assessment doesn't match the pattern I've started to connect to the patient, meaning that I'm missing information, or perhaps the case is more complex.

I typically feel the pulse at the first session, but not every following session, while I will check the tongue during most sessions. If the patient is coming in for a purely musculoskeletal issue, such as tennis elbow or a sprained ankle, I may not check their tongue or pulse at all. I also sometimes skip these diagnostic tools when I sense that the patient is skeptical about TCM, building their trust by meeting them closer to their comfort zone.

Asking

Many practitioners spend most of their time with assessment and each person has their preferred approach. Some will start with the chief complaint and others may assess from head to toe. Either way, for all but the simplest or most acute issues, TCM practitioners typically ask a wide range of questions, even ones that may seem unrelated. For example, a patient may have insomnia, but the practitioner may ask about digestion, or vice versa.

- What is the intensity of the symptom?
- How does the patient describe the sensation of this symptom?
- Is there a time of day it tends to occur or not occur?
- Is there a season when this symptom tends to occur or not occur?
- Is it affected by stress, food, sleep, mood, weather, or temperature?
- What does the patient find helps alleviate the symptom?
- What does the patient find aggravates the symptom?
- Is the symptom continuous or intermittent?
- When did the issue first occur and what was going on in the patient's life at that time?
- What aspects of living have been affected by the symptom?
- How does the patient feel emotionally when this symptom arises?
- Do any family members also experience this symptom?
- Do people living or working in the same environment complain of this symptom?

General questions, seemingly unrelated to the chief complaints are also valuable, and questions may include:

- How is the patient's energy level?
- Is their energy higher or lower than usual?
- If they say they are tired, does it feel like physical fatigue or mental fatigue?
- How is the patient's sleep?
- What is the patient's pattern to go to sleep, to stay asleep, and to wake up?
- Does the patient dream a lot, and if so, do they remember their dreams or how they felt?
- Does the patient feel rested when they wake up?
- When does the patient feel most energized and most sleepy?
- How is the patient feeling emotionally?
- How is the patient's digestion?
- Does the patient have any foods they avoid?
- Does the patient have any cravings for particular foods or flavors?
- How is the patient's appetite?
- What is the patient's dietary routine for food and timing to eat?
- How are the patient's bowel movements: frequency, consistency of stool, feeling of completion, any symptoms of discomfort?
- What is the patient's urination like: frequency, color, any symptoms of discomfort?
- How does the patient feel for body temperature: tendency to warm or cold, warm or cold hands or feet?
- Does the patient sweat normally?
- Does the patient have any issues with seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling (touch)?
- Does the patient experience shortness of breath or breathing issues?
- Does the patient have allergies or sensitivities?
- Does the patient have any skin issues: rashes, dry, oily, sensitive?
- Does the patient bruise easily?
- Does the patient have any heart issues or palpitations?
- How does the patient feel mentally: concentration, focus, decision-making, memory, planning, organizing, ability to perform common or familiar tasks?
- Does the patient have any pain?
- Has the patient undergone any surgeries or major medical procedures?
- What is the patient's medical history?
- What is the patient's family medical history?
- Does the patient have any blood test, urine test, imaging, or other reports to offer?
- What medications and supplements is the patient taking?
- What routines does the patient have for self-care: therapeutic treatments, breathing exercises, meditation, exercise?

My approach if a patient comes in with one or two chief complaints is to ask them about those issues and let them tell their story in their words. For me, the process of asking allows me time to use other aspects of assessment, listening and seeing. I listen to the wording they use, where they focus their attention, the volume and tone of their voice, their posture and body language as they talk, and perhaps what information they seem to leave out.

For example, many chronic pain patients feel unheard and defensive about their suffering. They may sit with their arms crossed in a self-protective posture and behave apologetically, leaving out key pieces of information like other therapies they've tried or medications they are on. Or they may act out angrily, talking loudly and quickly as they cover all the details of the injuries and list off all the tests, procedures, and treatments that have failed to bring them relief. With this, I can see how I can best respond to meet them where they are and gather the information I need. I can also start to formulate a TCM diagnosis using the five elements, eight guiding principles, and five vital substances.

In the example of the chronic pain patient who acts apologetic, I may start to guess that they are Earth element dominant and ask questions about their sensation of pain, energy level, potential digestive issues, feeling hot or cold, emotional health, and whether they have any self-care practices. If their pain is dull and heavy, they feel fatigued and foggy-headed, they have bloating and poor digestion, they are often worried, and they are caregivers to everyone but themselves, I can start to see a pattern:

- Earth element
- Possible Yang deficiency, internal, cold, deficiency
- Qi deficiency and stagnation (pain always causes stagnation) and Dampness

In the example of the chronic pain patient who acts angrily defensive, I might test to see if a Wood element dominant pattern is present. I could ask about their type of pain sensations, where they feel tension in their body, how do they feel for body temperature, how is their sleep, and question any hormonal imbalances. If their pain is aching and tight, they clench their teeth, have tight neck and shoulders, have cold hands and feet, suffer from insomnia, and suffer from PMS with irritability and fatigue, I would see the following patterns:

- Wood element
- Possible Yang excess, internal, cold, excess and deficiency
- Qi stagnation, Blood deficiency

This is only the start of a complete TCM diagnosis, but helps narrow the scope of possibilities, allowing for more specific questions.

Less often, but most appropriately, patients come in for assessment or treatment without any specific health complaints or issues. They are seeking optimal wellness and disease prevention. This is the ideal for TCM. While this is not practical in today's modern practice, it may be something to strive toward. For these wellness-care patients, I recommend they come in for treatment, usually acupuncture, as often as once a month if they have highly active and stressful lives, once every change of seasons for seasonal tune-ups, or a couple of times a year for checkup and small tweaks to potential health imbalances.

For most new patients, I do not do any treatment at the first appointment because I want to spend more time in assessment, so I can be clear about my TCM diagnosis, plan out my best treatment approach, and offer the patient dietary, lifestyle, and supplement recommendations. I email the recommendations to the patient in a detailed written treatment plan.

If a patient comes in with a specific pain, injury, or acute symptom like a current headache, cold, or nausea, I complete a shorter intake assessment and do a treatment in session one, noting to the patient that the first treatment will still be shorter than subsequent ones because of the need for more dialogue at intake.

Formulating a TCM Diagnosis

TCM diagnoses are quite different from conventional diagnoses in several ways. The language is different. Even words that are familiar hold different meanings. Diagnoses are often compounded patterns, not one or two words. Instead of irritable bowel syndrome, the TCM diagnosis might be Liver Qi stagnation attacking Spleen causing Spleen Qi deficiency and Dampness.

Diagnoses of diseases are not permanent, as TCM patterns can change, even if a disease is still present but symptoms change. A patient with type 2 diabetes may initially receive a TCM diagnosis of Lung, Spleen, and Stomach Yin deficiency, but as their blood sugars improve and they experience less thirst, less fatigue, and better managed appetite, they may no longer demonstrate these TCM patterns of imbalance.

While it's not uncommon to see a TCM diagnosis written as something like, "Qi deficiency" or "Blood stagnation," this is often not a complete enough assessment to know how to treat it. A key follow-up question would be, which organs are Qi deficient or have Blood stasis—all of them or some? Lung Qi deficiency would cause shortness of breath, weak cough, weak voice, weakened immune system, and a tendency to sweat easily, whereas Spleen Qi deficiency results in abdominal bloating, loose stools, and feeling of weakness in the limbs. Blood stagnation in the Heart causes palpitations, cyanosis of the lips, and pain or sensation of constriction in the chest, like a heart attack. By contrast, Liver Blood stagnation is much less of an emergency, and would likely present as irregular periods, dysmenorrhea, and fixed abdominal pain.

It takes years of study to be able to do a proper and complete TCM diagnosis, but there are a few general patterns of imbalance. Note, this is not a comprehensive list, but rather an introduction to some very basic components of TCM diagnosis.

Qi Deficiency

Qi deficiency is assessed when any organ is lacking enough Qi to be able to properly perform its functions. Symptoms will vary, depending on which organ is affected.

Some general symptoms of Qi deficiency can include:

- Fatigue
- Pale complexion and tongue
- Weak pulse

Qi Stagnation

When Qi ceases to move properly, it becomes stagnant, and, depending on where the stagnancy occurs, symptoms will vary.

Some general symptoms of Qi stagnation include:

- Pain
- Feeling of oppression or distension
- Emotional disturbances

Blood Deficiency

Blood is needed to nourish the organs and body. The Spleen provides the raw materials to make the Blood, the Heart governs the Blood's movement, and the Liver stores the Blood. Blood deficiency most often affects one or all these organs.

Some general symptoms of Blood deficiency include:

- Pallor
- Weakness and fatigue
- Pale and possibly thin tongue

Blood Stagnation or Stasis

Blood stagnation or stasis occurs when Blood doesn't flow normally or when it has become obstructed.

Some general symptoms of Blood stagnation include:

- Stabbing, fixed pain
- Dark complexion
- Blood clots
- Purplish or bluish nails, lips, or tongue

Yang Deficiency

Yang energy should be most active during the daytime, keeping us alert, awake, and able to react.

Some general symptoms of Yang deficiency include:

- Feeling cold
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Possible fluid accumulation

Yin Deficiency

Yin energy should be most active at night, helping us to sleep and providing nourishment and fluid to our tissues.

Some general symptoms of Yin deficiency include:

- Dryness
- Possibly feeling overheated at times
- Insomnia
- Trouble feeling rested and relaxed

Checklist for a TCM Diagnosis:

Some things a TCM practitioner does when creating a diagnosis include the following.

- ☐ Assess the Eight Principles
  - ☐ Yin/Yang
  - ☐ Internal/external
  - ☐ Cold/hot
  - ☐ Deficiency/excess
- ☐ Evaluate the status of the Five Vital Substances
  - ☐ Qi ☐ Deficiency ☐ Excess
  - ☐ Jing ☐ Deficiency ☐ Excess
  - ☐ Shen ☐ Deficiency ☐ Excess
  - ☐ Blood ☐ Deficiency ☐ Excess
  - ☐ Jin Ye ☐ Deficiency ☐ Excess
- ☐ Determine which of the Five Elements are most at play
  - ☐ Earth
  - ☐ Metal
  - ☐ Water
  - ☐ Wood
  - ☐ Fire
- ☐ Assess if any of the Six Pathogenic Factors are impacting the patient
  - ☐ Wind
  - ☐ Hot
  - ☐ Cold
  - ☐ Damp
  - ☐ Dry
  - ☐ Summer-Heat
- ☐ Identify which TCM organs are most affected
  - ☐ Spleen
  - ☐ Stomach
  - ☐ Lungs
  - ☐ Large Intestines
  - ☐ Kidneys
  - ☐ Urinary Bladder
  - ☐ Liver
  - ☐ Gallbladder
  - ☐ Heart
  - ☐ Small Intestines
  - ☐ Pericardium
  - ☐ San Jiao
- ☐ Decide which meridians are most affected
  - ☐ The above organ meridians
  - ☐ Du
  - ☐ Ren

Treatment

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has grown and evolved in to a modern system of medicine, which encompasses movement and lifestyle recommendations. Common treatment modalities include:

- Acupuncture
- Herbal medicine
- Nutrition
- Tui Na (pronounced "twee naw;" translates as "push and grasp;" Chinese massage)

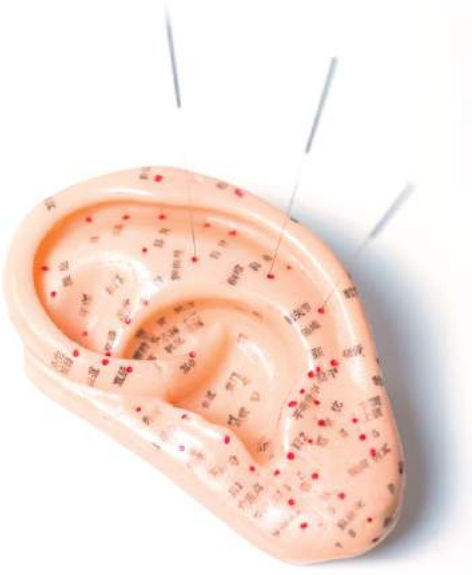
Other therapies that are often used alongside these core therapies include:

- Electroacupuncture
- Cupping
- Moxibustion
- Ear seeds

TCM continues to evolve and grow, and other types of treatments have also been brought into scope, including acupoint injection therapy or biopuncture, the use of lasers to locate and stimulate points, and acupuncture microsurgery. While we most identify with one standard type of acupuncture needle, the filiform needle, historically there are many other types, including ones that were used for lancing, cutting, and draining.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture involves the insertion of fine, filiform needles into specific points chosen based on a TCM diagnosis. If the patient has a simple injury or musculoskeletal pain, the treatment may resemble dry needling or even intramuscular stimulation done by a non-TCM practitioner, with local points, trigger points, and referral area points needled. On the other hand, some TCM practitioners will needle points far from the area of pain or damage, sometimes only on the opposite side of the body.



When the patient's issue is chronic or the condition is an internal one, acupuncture treatment usually addresses both the symptom and the cause, supporting the body's ability to heal itself, and a proper TCM diagnosis is needed to make it most effective.

Most people consider acupuncture first for pain treatment. Much of the research on it, particularly early studies, has been done to determine its benefits for treating pain and the mechanisms of action for how it does that. However, it works for a wide array of symptoms, conditions, and illnesses.

If a patient comes in with pain, movement issues like limited range of motion, tension, or weakness, acupuncture is the first treatment I offer them. It works wonders to improve blood flow to the affected tissues, which speeds healing.

Stress is the other main reason I recommend acupuncture. While it seems counterintuitive, acupuncture leaves patients feeling calmer immediately after treatment. Patients who suffer from anxiety and who are initially worried about being needled often report being incredibly relaxed during and after acupuncture. Those patients who say they can't meditate, never nap, and have trouble staying still often fall asleep on the table. I think of acupuncture as a way to "cheat" into a meditative state.

Acupuncture can treat any condition, but, like any form of treatment, different people respond differently, some getting fast and powerful results while others respond more slowly, and some may not respond at all.

The most common question asked about acupuncture is whether it hurts, so this is the first thing I address with patients, assuring them it is not painful. There are many styles of acupuncture, and my style is to start low and go slow, starting with few needles and light treatment and building up only as needed to get response. I avoid strong, intense needling techniques, preferring instead ones that get the required result while still allowing the patient to be comfortable and often take a nap on the table.

There are also press needles that are very short needles with stickers that can be left in place for a few days. They are very comfortable to wear and usually don't feel like anything, so I choose these for patients who are nervous about needles and pain. I may also use them for a first visit when I have very limited time to do a treatment, but want some therapeutic benefit in that session, or as an add-on to a regular acupuncture visit to extend the benefits of the acupuncture points.

Herbal Medicine

Chinese herbal medicine prescribes a combination of herbs based on the TCM diagnosis, rarely prescribing a single herb. There are some common formulas for simple patterns or symptoms, like Yin Qiao San for a cold, sore throat, cough, and fever without sweating. Formulas need a correct TCM diagnosis to be most effective. In the example of the cold, had the patient's symptoms instead been a fever without sweating, body aches, headache, and runny nose, the correct formula would be Ma Huang Tang and the first formula would be less effective, if effective at all.

Chinese herbal formulas may be prescribed as raw herbs that are cooked in hot water to make herbal decoctions, rolled with honey into pills, steeped in alcohol to make tinctures, concentrated into powders to be mixed in hot water and drank, or added into capsules to swallow. While vitamins, minerals, and other supplements are often prescribed to be taken ongoing and indefinitely, TCM herbal formulas are usually prescribed for a defined period of time, though that can be long-term if the condition is chronic, the pattern is relatively unchanging, and the herbs are safe to take long-term.

I mostly prescribe concentrated herbal powders that patients can mix into hot water and drink as tea, though the herbs often don't taste good. The most common reasons that I recommend herbal formulas is for digestive issues, dermatologic conditions, and chronic disease when they are unable or unwilling to get enough acupuncture treatments. These are the conditions I find most responsive to TCM herbals.

Nutrition

Nutrition is called "food cures" in TCM, and for many with Chinese parents or grandparents, it is ingrained in the culture. Many have family recipes for when someone gets sick, has a bellyache, feels tired, is pregnant, or wants to conceive. There is often a combination of tradition, superstition, and nutritional benefit with food cures in TCM.

The focus of nutrition in TCM is similar to herbal medicine, and in fact, many TCM herbs are foods, like ginger, garlic, turmeric, green tea, dates, ginseng, and astragalus. A

TCM diagnosis determines ingredients to include or exclude. In addition, both herbs and foods are assessed based on their flavor, temperature, affinity to affect specific body parts, and overall effect on the body. For example, is a food salty, sweet, bitter, pungent, sour, or bland? Is it hot, warm, neutral, cool, or cold, as in whether the food cools the body like mint or cucumber, or warms the body like ginger and chili pepper?

Some herbs and foods have an affinity to affect specific body parts. For example, ginger can ease stomach symptoms, whereas garlic helps the heart and lungs. The overall effect a food has is also considered—does it moisten, dry, lift energy, calm energy, or open the sinuses?

TCM also focuses on recommending foods that are:

- Local
- In-season
- Generally cooked for easier digestion

I make nutritional recommendations for almost all my patients, emailing them a treatment plan that includes a list of foods to limit or avoid and foods to enjoy, the latter being the emphasis. My approach is a mix of TCM food cures and modern nutrition principles regarding nutrients and their studied effects. I also focus on foods that would be readily available, relatively easy to prepare, and tasty.

Tui Na

Tui Na is a Chinese therapeutic massage and may be used as treatment on its own or in combination with acupuncture or other TCM therapies. Practitioners use fingers, hands, elbows, or even knees and feet to apply pressure to specific areas on the patient's body.

Many of the techniques are similar to that of Western massage, including pressing, pulling, kneading, rubbing, tapping, and gliding. The therapist may select specific muscles, tendons, and body structures as the target tissue to work on and may also treat acupressure points. These acupressure points are the same as acupuncture points.

Tui Na practitioners may also use chiropractic-like manipulations or Thai massage-like stretches to move the patient for the purpose of adjusting joints, stretching muscles, and improving blood flow.

Another form of massage-like treatment is gua sha. "Gua" means to scrape or rub, while "sha" refers to the reddish raised skin that initially results from a treatment. A smooth-edged hard tool, like bone, turtle shell, stone, or metal is used to friction along the skin. It may be used to treat painful and tight muscles and fascia, improve local circulation, treat congestion or fever caused by a cold, and clear heat stroke or Summer-Heat.

I use very little Tui Na in my practice, preferring instead to use acupuncture or, in some cases, cupping. I believe Tui Na to be a very effective therapy, but it requires a great deal of training and ongoing practice to be most effective. While I learned manual adjustments, I prefer to let those with more skill in this field apply those therapies.

Other Core Therapies

Electroacupuncture

Electroacupuncture employs an electronic device attached to the metal handles of two needles to deliver continuous electric pulses between them. The frequency and intensity can be varied to suit the condition and the patient. Some of the benefits of electroacupuncture include:

- Less precision for placement of needles is required, as the electric stimulation covers a bigger surface
- There is no need for the practitioner to re-stimulate the needles partway through the treatment, as stimulation is continuous with the electric pulses

Many practitioners regularly use electroacupuncture with most of their acupuncture needling, and it may be particularly helpful for treating:

- Neurological conditions
- Chronic pain
- Spasms
- Paralysis

I rarely use electroacupuncture, preferring instead precise needling, manual stimulation of the needles, and a gentler acupuncture style.

Cupping

Cupping is the use of small cups applied to the skin with suction. The cups may be made of glass, bamboo, plastic, or silicone. Glass and bamboo cups are applied using fire that is briefly introduced into the cup to consume the oxygen inside and create a vacuum. The cup is then quickly placed on the skin. Plastic cups are used with a small pump to pull air out and created suction. Silicone cups are pliable, so they can easily be placed on the skin and pressed down or squeezed to push out the air and create the vacuum suction.

The suction causes the upper layers of tissue to be pulled into the cup, stretching the skin, fascia, and superficial parts of muscles.

Cupping's suction draws tissues strongly into the cup, so it is common and normal to have small broken superficial blood vessels, leaving a bruise or red mark. It is not harmful and will go away on its own, like a bruise. The more suction applied, the longer the cup is left in one place, the more congested the tissue is, and the more prone to bruising a person is, the more likely the mark will be bigger or darker.

No matter which type of cup is used, some reasons for cupping are:

- Improve local blood circulation
- Loosen tight muscles and stretch fascia
- Treat common cold symptoms and respiratory issues
- Detoxify the body

There are a few different techniques to cupping, including:

- Stationary cupping
- Moving cupping
- Flash cupping
- Wet or bleeding cupping

Stationary cupping involves the placement of a cup on one point, leaving it there for 5-15 minutes, sometimes over an acupuncture needle. Moving cupping involves oil or lotion applied to the skin before the cup is placed, so the cup can be moved along the skin. I call this a "reverse massage" that lifts the tissue instead of pressing into it. In flash cupping, the cup is quickly placed and removed several times. This is generally used in areas where light suction is required, so no bruising will be left, such as on the face. Finally, in wet or bleeding cupping, a small cut is made on the skin prior to the cup being placed so that the suction will draw out blood.

There is limited research on cupping, though it has been found to be effective for treating cervical spondylitis, facial paralysis, acne, and herpes zoster. It has been used for centuries in many countries. Cupping has gained recognition and is becoming more popular as a treatment practice by athletic therapists, trainers, massage therapists, physiotherapists, and others. It has also been called myofascial decompression therapy.

I sometimes employ cupping at the end of an acupuncture session, usually to help relieve muscle tension, using either stationary cupping or moving cupping. Though I still like the glass fire cupping, using when I want the additional benefit of a warming element, I prefer the ease and safety of the silicone cups. I learned how to use bamboo cups when I trained in China, but they are not easy to clean effectively, and therefore are not as sanitary. I have a set of the plastic cups with a pump, but never use it because I find them less comfortable for patients and I think that some practitioners apply them too strongly.

Though marks are often left on the skin, it should not be a painful treatment to receive. It feels unusual and occasionally slightly uncomfortable, especially over very tight areas, but most patients find it pleasant and relaxing.

Moxibustion

Moxibustion is a heat therapy that involves the burning of the dried herb mugwort or ai ye *(Folium artemisiae argyi)*, called moxa, over specific points on the body. Moxibustion can be done either direct or indirect.

Direct moxibustion involves forming the moxa into a cone shape and placing it directly on the skin before lighting it. Scarring moxibustion allows the moxa to be burned down completely and it leaves a scar. With non-scarring moxibustion, the moxa is removed before it burns down too far, allowing for a pleasant warming sensation. Another method is to use small, rice-sized pieces of moxa that are burned directly on the skin. They are very small, and therefore there is less chance they will burn the skin.

Indirect moxibustion is the burning of moxa near, but not directly on, the skin. It may involve placement of the moxa cone atop a slice of ginger, an herb called fu zi *(Radix aconiti lateralis)*, garlic, or salt. Moxa may also be put on the ends of acupuncture needles

or burned in boxes that are placed on a body part, like the abdomen or back.

Another form of indirect moxibustion involves moxa rolled or pressed into sticks that look similar in shape to cigars. One end is lit and moved in patterns close to the skin.

Moxibustion is most commonly used to:

- Warm the tissues, meridians, or internal organs
- Increase blood circulation
- Relieve pain
- Heal injuries
- Treat digestive issues
- Address skin issues
- Strengthen the immune system
- Fortify the body

Burning moxa has a distinct odor and produces smoke. There are smokeless forms of moxa sticks, but they still smell something like incense. While some may like the smell, many clinics have scent-free policies. As a result, I don't use moxibustion in clinic, but sometimes send patients home with a moxa stick and instructions of how to use it, depending on their condition, and strict directions to be careful not to burn themselves. I have never practiced scarring moxibustion and use only indirect moxibustion.

Ear seeds

Ear seeds are tiny seeds, metal, or magnets adhered temporarily on points on the ear to stimulate related tissues and functions. This is based on a form of acupuncture called auricular acupuncture. The points can be needled during an acupuncture session, or ear seeds can be applied and worn by the patient for up to a week.

Referring to a TCM

Though this resource describes TCM, including some basics about how a TCM diagnosis is made and the treatment forms used, it is not possible to teach this complex system-based medicine in one book. TCM is a complex system and cannot be effectively used piecemeal, particularly in complex patient cases. Instead, I encourage you to find experienced and trustworthy TCM practitioners with whom you can form referral relationships.

With this resource, your better understanding of TCM will allow you to more effectively dialogue with these colleagues. When referring to a TCM practitioner, consider these steps:

1. Find out if your region has licensing or registration requirements for TCM practitioners.

2. Learn the titles of the TCM practitioner types. In the United States, licensed acupuncturist (L.Ac.) is common, but there is also diplomate in acupuncture (Dipl. Ac.), diplomate in Chinese herbology (Dipl. C.H.), diplomate in oriental medicine (Dipl. O.M.), doctor of oriental medicine (DOM), and more. In British Columbia, Canada, where I live, we have registered acupuncturists (R.Ac.), registered TCM herbalists (R.TCM.H.), registered TCM practitioners (R.TCM.P.), and registered doctors of TCM (Dr.TCM).

3. Make sure the person you plan on building a referral relationship with is currently licensed and in good standing.

4. Ask about their area of expertise. Do they have special training or knowledge in any specific health area or condition? While their regulatory board may not allow them to call themselves specialists, many have areas of focus for treating.

5. Ask about their training and length of time in practice. Being a new practitioner isn't always a negative, as newer therapists may be fresher with their knowledge and more open to learning. However, experience is often an asset.

6. Ask about the kinds of treatments they offer patients. For example, just because TCM food cures is a part of TCM practice doesn't mean they use it often, so this may not be something you can refer to them for. Conversely, they may offer an injection therapy or other practice not discussed here that could be valuable to your patients.

7. If you are sharing a patient, discuss how you will communicate treatment plans and coordinate therapies.

8. Consider getting a treatment yourself so you can see how they operate in practice.

CASE STUDY

Meet John

At John's first appointment, he rose cautiously and slowly from the waiting room chair. At 62-years-old, he was suffering from dull, low back pain that had been plaguing him on and off for at least thirty years.

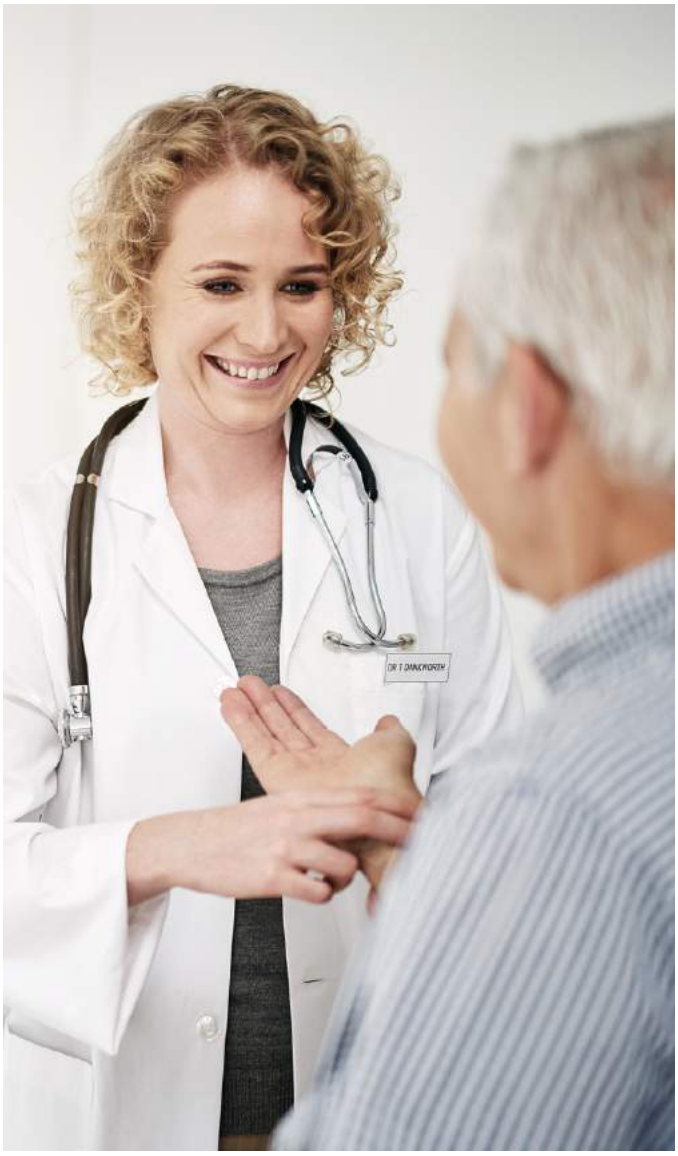
His recent x-ray showed basically normal, but the report noted some signs of degeneration. He stated that the pain would get worse over the day and he felt better when resting lying down. A warm heat pad and some gentle pressure on his back were the only things that brought him relief.

In both high school and college, John was an active athlete, playing football and hockey, but stopping those activities when he graduated because he became too busy with work. During those years of sports, he had sustained several minor soft tissue injuries, mostly strains and sprains at his knees and back, and possibly a few traumatic brain injuries, though those were not assessed at the time.

John found himself frequently tired, though he continued to work long days at a highly stressful job. Even though he knew it aggravated his anxiety, he used caffeine to keep himself energized because he didn't get enough sleep. He also had some trouble with sleep, bothered by the discomfort caused by his back, a need to get up to urinate, and a racing mind that had him thinking about work and the tasks he needed to complete. In addition, he struggled with an enlarged prostate that caused him some urinary frequency issues, waking him a few times a night to urinate.

His tongue was pale, puffy, and very moist. His pulse was wiry and thready.

John was anxious to start acupuncture treatment that day to help relieve his back pain, so he was set up prone on the table. His lower back felt cold to the touch, though he had not applied any ice. He mentioned that he did tend toward feeling cold and that he preferred warm foods and drinks. His back muscles felt tight on palpation, and he involuntarily twitched with guarding when his quadratus lumborum were pressed.



Based on this information, answer the following questions:

1. Using the ba gua eight principles, was his condition more excess or deficiency, more hot or cold, more internal or external, and more Yin or Yang?
2. Which of the five elements seems most affected for this patient?
3. Which of the five vital substances is/are most likely affected?
4. What further observations could be used to assess his condition?
5. What practical recommendations could be made?

My diagnosis is as follows: deficiency; cold; external and internal; Yang deficiency.

Based on my examination, I found the patient to be experiencing more deficiency than excess signs. Though pain is caused by stagnation, which is an excess sign, his pain, being chronic and long-lasting, was caused by deficiency. He was often tired and didn't get enough sleep, so his Qi was depleted. Additionally, his back felt better with light pressure and with rest. Finally, his tongue was pale and his pulse thready. The wiry pulse indicated a pain pattern.

He tended toward more signs of cold, as a warm heat pad brought relief and he felt cold and preferred warm drinks and food. His back condition was more external, as it affected his muscles, but his prostate issues, insomnia, and fatigue were internal. He also had signs of Yang deficiency with feeling cold and a pale, puffy, and moist tongue.

The Water element was most at play. Low back pain, prostate and urinary issues, anxiety and fear, a history of ear infections, and what may be some adrenal issues point to the Kidneys, which belong to the Water element.

Of the five vital substances, I focused on the status of Jing, Qi, and Shen. For Jing, he's showing signs of his age with a decline in Essence, and historically his tendency to getting sick indicates some congenital weakness. There is likely Qi deficiency as he doesn't rest/sleep enough and works too hard. Last, disturbances in his Shen appear for him as anxiety.

I went on to observe and note his appearance and demeanor. Is he pale or does he have a red complexion? Pale would indicate more Qi or Blood deficiency; red would indicate some Heat signs or possible agitation. Dark circles under his eyes would further indicate Kidney Qi deficiency.

I further noted his mental status, as this could affect his level of muscle tension and his ability to heal. John seemed slightly anxious, nervous, and agitated. This could be explained by the fact that acupuncture was a new treatment for him, and he was in pain. I made a note to check his mental status at the next visit, for comparison, as it could also be his general baseline state, indicating I should make sure to select more points for calming his Shen. Ensuring he was comfortable and as at ease as possible was important to make the acupuncture most effective. The body heals more effectively and efficiently when in a parasympathetic state, rather than a sympathetic state.

Though I didn't have the time in this visit to address the details of his daily exercise, sleep, dietary, and other habits, I noted to gather this information in subsequent visits. Restful and restorative sleep is key to healing. Proper movement activities are needed to ensure strength, flexibility, and whole-body health. And what he chooses to eat can promote or decrease inflammation, as well as provide the right nutrients for repairing tissue.

My recommendations were to:

- Return for two to four more acupuncture sessions to relieve his back pain and set him on course for better future health outcomes
- Discuss potential treatment for ongoing, occasional, or routine maintenance care
- Get more sleep
- Use a heat pack to warm his back or soak in a hot water bath to relax his muscles
- Do gentle strengthening exercises
- Eat warm nourishing food
- I prescribed him some magnesium glycinate capsules to help relax his muscles, as well as some omega-3 essential fatty acids to support anti-inflammatory action.
- I made note to talk with him about a customized Chinese herbal formula to support his system overall and help with relaxation and sleep.

I sent my recommendations for food, lifestyle, supplements, and treatment to my patient via email a day or two after the initial visit.

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Melissa Carr is a registered Dr. of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), lecturer, and health writer. She has a degree in kinesiology and worked in medical research in Japan prior to her Traditional Chinese Medicine studies in both Canada and China. As a result, she loves to blend Eastern and Western natural health knowledge and therapies.

In practice since 2001, Dr. Carr enjoys working at integrative medicine clinics because she believes that coordinating health professionals can provide the best patient experience and outcomes. Having worked with some of the top names in sports and entertainment, Dr. Carr was chosen as one of the few acupuncturists for Vancouver's 2010 Olympics and Paralympics, and also volunteered at the World Police and Fire Games.

As a passionate educator, Dr. Carr has been a teaching assistant for anatomy and an instructor for nutrition at the West Coast College of Massage Therapy. She now continues educating the public about natural health matters via lectures, including to Blue Cross, David Suzuki Foundation, Fraser Health Authority, and the University of British Columbia.

She is an advisory board member of Alive magazine, writes for several publications, and was a columnist for a Vancouver newspaper. She is now in the process of writing a book on nutrition from a TCM perspective.