

TCM: All in the mind

by Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton

info@shen-nong.com

In traditional Chinese medicine, mental activities and the emotions are referred to as *shen* (spirit) and are closely connected to the functions of the internal organs.

As we age, physical deterioration leads to mental weakness, causing poor memory, slow response rates, fatigue, insomnia and abnormal behaviour.

TCM holds that *shen* resides in the heart, which provides blood and *chi* (vital energy) for it to function. The blood and *chi* come from the spleen, and the liver regulates the *shen*, influencing emotional responses, in particular. As a result, mental ageing is mostly associated with the heart, liver and spleen. Managing mental health in TCM involves ensuring that these three organs stay in good condition by nourishing the heart, invigorating the spleen and soothing the liver.

Good lifestyle choices are important for a peaceful mind, which helps to slow down the ageing of *shen* in the heart. Sour jujube seed, schisandra, red sage root (*dang shen*), longan aril, red dates, poria, lily buds, honey, milk, lotus seed

and lotus root are good for replenishing blood to the heart.

In some cases, the heart is hyperactive, which can lead to dizziness, excitability, irritability and confusion. Calming it down can be done using lophatherum herb (*dan zhu ye*), lotus seed cores, gardenia fruit, white chrysanthemum, bitter melon, watermelon and mung beans.

An adequate amount of sleep and head and foot massage are also good for calming the mind.

In TCM, overuse of the brain is harmful to *chi* circulation and will exhaust the blood in the heart and spleen. This can lead to stagnated *chi*, blood stasis and internally accumulated metabolic wastes and subsequent mental health problems. Regular exercise is especially important, because it helps to relieve mental stress and promotes *chi* and blood flow.

To combat mental exhaustion, tonics that contain ingredients such as pilose asiabell root (*dang shen*), poria, Chinese yam, largehead atractylodes root (*bai shu*), lotus seeds, red dates, longan aril,

pumpkin and mushrooms are useful. Emotional problems such as depression, irritability and sustained anger are harmful to brain health and greatly contribute to premature ageing. In TCM theory, the liver plays an important role in regulating emotional reactions. A stable emotional state depends on the harmony of *chi* and blood. When the liver keeps *chi* flowing smoothly, a relaxed internal environment is said to have been created.

TCM can relieve these problems with herbs such as nutgrass (*xiang fu*), turmeric root-tuber (*yu jin*), finger citron fruit, Chinese thorowax root (*chai hu*), tangerine peel, rose, jasmine and white peony root. These herbs are said to promote the liver's regulating ability and to reduce any physical damage that arises from mental stress.

A full medical examination by a qualified practitioner should be undertaken for severe or long-term mental or emotional problems.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner