

HEALTH

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TCM

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Pushed to the limit

Endurance exercise such as next week's Trailwalker in Hong Kong pushes the body to the extreme.

It's demanding on muscles, but also determines how long the body can tolerate the build-up of non-recyclable waste chemicals while avoiding the depletion of essential chemicals such as water and sodium.

Extreme exercise has been associated with suppression of the immune response, although it's unclear why this happens.

According to TCM theory, endurance is regulated by *chi*, which is regarded as the life force or source of all movement.

Movement encompasses physical activity (walking, dancing), involuntary movement (breathing, heartbeat), willed action (eating, speaking), mental action (thinking, dreaming) and

development, growth and life processes (birth, maturation and ageing).

In TCM's modern understanding, *chi* optimises the body's metabolism and physiological activities, which would include efficient utilisation of glucose and oxygen.

Excessive exercise may cause deficient *chi*, which may explain the suppression of the body's immune system.

The goal in TCM is to maintain sufficient *chi* to improve physical endurance. Although Asian ginseng is the most powerful herb to increase *chi*, it should be reserved for restoring severely depleted

levels. More appropriate herbs for replenishing and building up *chi* are *huangqi* (Astragalus root) and American ginseng.

Although *huangqi* is suitable for people with, among other things, cold limbs and those with an aversion to cold, it may worsen conditions such as pimples, mouth ulcers and constipation.

American ginseng may be more suitable for those with a hot constitution or people who tend to have lots of energy.

If someone has an infection such as a cold or flu, herbs that increase *chi* need to be discontinued because they may worsen the problem.

Before a race or other extreme exercise, spicy foods and those that can't be digested easily should be avoided because the spleen and stomach are the source of *chi* production.

The two organs can be enhanced by consuming the likes of lotus seeds, carrots, spinach, apples and cucumber.

Consult your TCM or general practitioner before taking any medicine