

HEALTH

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TCM

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Mood maladies

As responses to external stimuli, emotions affect not only your psychological state, but your physiological functions, and can play a role in disease development. TCM regards emotions as manifestations of physiological functions in the organs, mainly the heart, liver, spleen, lung and kidneys. Emotions are adjustments the body makes to accommodate the external environment.

Essence and *chi* (vital energy) are present in all organs and constitute the material basis for emotional activities. From long-term observation, Chinese medicine physicians concluded that anger, anxiety, fright, grief, over-joy, over-thinking and terror, known as the "seven emotions" are the most common experienced.

Within normal limits, these emotions cause no harm. However, when they become uncontrollable, outbursts can cause damage to specific organs. For example: anger impairs the

liver, over-joy impairs the heart, grief and anxiety impair the lungs, over-thinking impairs the spleen and fright and terror impair the kidneys.

Because extreme emotional frustrations exhaust the essence of the organs, especially their *chi*, they can cause damage that's beyond the ability of the body to repair. Physical signs that these emotions may be causing harm are as follows:

- Anger makes the liver's *chi* ascend, which sends the blood upward. Individuals may experience symptoms of dizziness, a full and heavy feeling in the head and weakness in the lower limbs.

- Over-joy scatters heart *chi*, which is largely responsible for regulating brain functions; so individuals may experience difficulty concentrating, be absent-minded and feel disorientated. In extreme cases, mania may develop.

- Grief and anxiety consume lung *chi* and individuals may feel low-spirited, have difficulty breathing and feel weary.

- Over-thinking stagnates spleen *chi*. Since the spleen in TCM is largely responsible for digestive functions, symptoms are likely to appear such as a poor appetite, gastric distress, belching and acid reflux.

- Terror and fright cause kidney

chi to decline and disturb general *chi* flow. Individuals may suffer panic, heart palpitations and restlessness. There may be incontinence of urine or stool, which is due to a decline in kidney *chi*.

The idea of emotions corresponding to specific organs provides guidelines for clinical applications in TCM. A frenzied delight for no reason can be due to too much essence in the heart. So, we can treat the heart with herbs to reduce the amount of heart essence.

Constant sadness may be due to inadequate lung *chi*, which may be treated with a decoction to replace lung *chi*. Irritability and easy provocation can be due to hyperactivity of the liver *chi*, so depressing liver function can reduce the hyperactivity.

Over-concentration and increased stress cause spleen dysfunction, so fortifying the digestive system is essential. Timidness is a sign of kidney essence deficiency and may be helped by replenishing it and enhancing kidney functions.

Rose Tse and Angela Collingwood are editors for Shen-Nong, a subsidiary of Integrated Chinese Medicine. Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or general practitioner