

# Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic

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### TCM & Stress Management

Why can't life be simple? In a modern fast pace society, it seems as though everything in life has become more and more complicated.

Does any of the following sound familiar? While driving on the free way fighting heavy traffic, your son calls your cell phone, you are late for his first football game. Project dead-lines are closing in at work and your boss is breathing down your neck. Meanwhile, you forgot to buy flowers and a card for a loved one's birthday. Maybe your aged parents depend on you to make decision for them. The list keeps piling up causing you stress and as we all know; **STRESS adversely impacts our lives.**

**Stress can cause many negative physical, mental, and behavior responses, some we or even our doctors may not be aware of!**

Here are some examples of some real patients under stress:

“My Doctor told me, I need to see a psychiatrist for anger control”

“Dr. Hu, I think I am going crazy, I have anxiety, and it seems I can't calm down”

“I feel pain in my stomach every time my supervisor calls me in for a meeting, “

“I have no sexual desire”

“I feel exhausted at the end of day but my thoughts keep me from falling asleep”.

“My stomach feels full after dinner, but my mind still tells me I'm hungry.

**Medical books do not mention “Stress” as an illness and thus offer no effective long term treatments.**

Many health problems caused from stress can not be explain by Bio medicine. In most cases, bio medicine will label your stress with mental and/or physical problems offering medication that will actually make the problem worse.

## **Stress impacts our body in the Bio physiological way:**

Internal and external sources of stress will affect our sympathetic nervous system. This in turn triggers our adrenal gland to secrete hormones which include:

1. Cortisone, deals with acute conditions but at the expense of comprising our immunity. People experiencing long term stress will have lower immunity. Cortisone increases fatty tissue deposits and the body will retain more sugar in order to help deal with a stressful situation. People generally gain weight when under chronic long term stress.
2. Aldosterone increases water and salt retention. People under chronic stress are prone to hypertension and edema.
3. Androgen, Females under long term stress, typically have irregular menstrual cycle, grow unwanted hair, have painful PMS, and have difficulty becoming pregnant due to excess secretion of Androgen.
4. Adrenal medulla hormone includes Epinephrine and Non-epinephrine. This hormone is called the “fight and flight hormone” and deals with urgent situations. Adrenal Medulla causes all peripheral arteries to contract raising blood pressure and heart rate. Some under long term stress will have pale complexion, stomach tightness, headache, cold hands and cold feet.

It should be noted that the Vagus Nervous System (parasympathetic nerve system) counter-acts the sympathetic nervous system to help balance stress. When activated, visceral blood vessels dilate and the visceral organ increases blood flow. The body then starts to rejuvenate. The peripheral arterial and facial muscle become relaxed, there is increased circulation to the skin, blood pressure returns back to normal and the heart rate stabilizes.

To reduce stress is to reduce sympathetic impulses and increase Vagus nerve tone.

## **Traditional Chinese Medicine Treating Stress**

TCM believes stress of any form can cause Qi (Energy) stagnation which restricts energy flow to the muscles, the internal organs and to the skin.

1. The digestive system (Spleen organ energy) can not flow and may follow with stomach ache, belching and reflux. The spleen may not properly transform food to energy. There can be a craving for instant energy (carbohydrates and/or sweets) to supplement the sensation and often this becomes a major factor for weight gain.
2. When spleen function decreases, (lowering energy production) this then will also impact the heart to cause a heart deficiency (spleen – heart deficiency pattern). There typically will be an increase in anxiety, panic attack, sleeping disorders and other related emotion disorders.
3. Stress with Qi stagnation also means lung energy can not flow freely. There is a tendency for shallow breathing and a sensation of fullness in the chest which leads to more blocked energy flow. When the lungs cannot properly exchange air, one will feel pressure in the chest, may experience headaches, be irritable and in the longer term may experience chronic fatigue.
4. Stress in Females often affects the reproductive system and causes emotional changes. TCM believes that Liver Energy stagnation caused from stress can directly impact the menstrual cycle, cause PMS and will often make it difficult to become pregnant.

The key is to decrease sympathetic impulse by increasing vagus or parasympathetic nervous system and to remove Qi stagnation and promote free flowing energy to the organs. Walking, jogging, yoga and meditation help to manage mild stress as does a healthy diet and sufficient sleep.

**In combination with the above, Acupuncture is the most effective way to manage stress!**

Often during an initial acupuncture treatment there is a sense of deep relaxation. Falling asleep is very good sign. Often patients experience stomach noise during acupuncture indicating parasympathetic nerve is in high tone, visceral organ circulation has increased and the organs (especially digestion system) start to rejuvenate the body. Blood pressure is also lowered as well as heart rate.

**Acupuncture can improve the parasympathetic nervous system and rejuvenate body!**

**Moxibustion** has been used throughout Asia for thousands of years and involves the burning of mugwort, a small, spongy herb that facilitates healing. The purpose of Moxibustion, as with most forms of traditional Chinese medicine, is to strengthen the blood, stimulate the flow of *Qi*, and help maintain general good health. Used along with Acupuncture this can be a very effective way to strengthen weak organs and recover from long term stress.

**Herbal formulas** are also used to strengthen weak organs and promote free flow of energy and blood circulation.

***For concerns or questions about Stress & Stress related disorders, please contact Dr. Helen Hu for an immediate consultation!***

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