

Acupuncture and Stress

Stress is a natural nonspecific response of the body to the various demands we place upon it. However, stress is not necessarily negative. There is a distinction between healthy and unhealthy stress. Healthy stress includes appropriate physical exercise, positive thinking, and a natural response to emergency situations. These stressors keep us alert and motivated and support our body's strength and vitality. Unhealthy stress, such as negative emotions and thinking, overexertion, poor diet, lack of sleep, and environmental toxins challenge our health and can trigger physical and mental problems, particularly if they are experienced over a prolonged period.



In ancient times, our stress response, also known as our fight or flight response, provided us with energy to preserve life during difficult situations such as an attack or threat by a wild animal. Unfortunately, modern day stress is considerably higher, more frequent and more consistent than what our predecessors experienced. We don't have to look much further than our computer screens to view various forms of stressors-- everything from work, family and money concerns, international concerns, traffic, pollution, the economy, the environment -- all these combine to send even the most serene people into a stressful frenzy.

Over time this excess stress can be detrimental to our health. Our body's natural response to stressful situations is to activate all available resources for survival and to get us out of a scary situation fast. However, with the increase in physical, emotional, and mental stressors, our stress response gets "locked in," resulting in the depletion of the body's resources.

Even if the stressors are no longer present, the body continues to keep the stress response active. This results in the depletion of our nervous system, lymphatic organs, kidneys and adrenal glands, and can pave the way for a wide variety of symptoms. Medical studies have shown that with increased and consistent stress our white blood cells, which defend our body against viruses, decrease. This decrease results in lower immune resistance, ultimately leading to physical disease and emotional instability.



There is hope. Practitioners of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) have been helping people cope with stress for thousands of years. The ancient theories of TCM on how stress affects the body organs are similar to those of Western Medicine; however, TCM treatments go far beyond treating just the symptoms.

Along with treating physical and emotional symptoms associated with stress, this ancient medicine addresses the root causes of this problem. One way that stress affects the body is by causing a depletion or blockage of Qi (chee), especially that of the kidneys and adrenals. Qi is the life energy that animates and supports the functions of the body. It flows through specific pathways called meridians and provides nourishment for the entire body. When Qi becomes blocked or depleted, the body and organ systems become "stressed out" and our health is compromised. The acupuncturist's job is to support and restore the integrity of the various organs affected and depleted by the stress response, along with evaluating the quality and quantity of Qi. Acupuncture and TCM can provide a safe, effective, and drug-free alternative for the treatment of stress.