

Shiatsu Info

The Oriental View of Health

Most of us think of our health only when we are sick. Then we want to fight off the sickness so we can get on with our life as before. Oriental medicine says that we must think of our health every day -- health is not just a static state but a dynamic balance. Health includes one's physical, emotional, and spiritual functions. It includes our relationship with our self, with our families, with society at large, and with our environment.

Yin-yang Theory

The Chinese use yin-yang theory to explain the world and its phenomena. Yin-yang is not only a description of how things function in relation to each other, but it is also a way of thinking -all things are seen as a part of the whole. Nothing is seen in *isolation* or as absolute. Yin represents that which is dark, cold, at rest, passive, interior, inward, decreasing, hidden. Yang represents that which is light, hot, active, exterior, outward, increasing and visible. A phenomenon is described as yin or as yang only in relationship to some other phenomenon. For example, cold is yin and hot is yang, but cool is yang in relation to freezing cold (yin) and warm is yin in relation to burning hot (yang).

Yin and yang create each other, define each other, control each other, and transform into each other. They are not absolute, but relative concepts. Each yin or yang can continually be further subdivided into yin and yang.

The ideal is that yin and yang are in balance. When yin and yang are in balance, the person is healthy, and all systems function well. When yin and yang become unbalanced, signs and symptoms of discomfort or disease may appear.

The Whole

In Oriental Medicine, the body, mind, and spirit are not separated -- physical trauma may cause mental discord; mental unrest may cause physical symptoms. The person is looked at as a whole being. For example, if someone has a neck problem, the person would be questioned and observed for clues as to what has caused the neck problem, but information about their whole life, including digestion, sleep, work, play, elimination, reproduction etc., would also be necessary to get a picture of the other factors that contribute to the problem. Treatment would be directed locally to the neck itself, but also distally to the arms, back, and legs. In addition, self-care measures would be given. These may

include exercises, dietary recommendations, relaxation, work, or postural changes.

The Healthy Whole

Health is a dynamic state of well-being of the body and of the mind and of the spirit. It encompasses one's relationship with your self, with your family, with your society and with the environment.

The Make-up of the Body-Mind-Spirit Jing, Shen, Ki, Blood, and Fluids

The 'filters' of Oriental Medicine are different from those of Western medicine. Western medicine describes the body and its functioning in terms of muscles, bones, chemicals, hormones etc. The fundamental substances of Oriental Medicine are jing (essence), shen (spirit), and Ki (vital energy), Blood, and Fluids. (By convention, words that are capitalized indicate that the term in Oriental Medicine has a different meaning to that of Western medicine.) Body functioning is not ascribed to discreet parts of the body, but to the amount of and movement of substances in the body-mind.

Organs and Meridians

The Organs in Oriental Medicine are not the same as the Western anatomical organs. The Western heart is essentially a pump that circulates blood. The Heart in Oriental Medicine describes the physical and psychological functions of the body-mind as it relates to the fundamental substances. Heart functioning includes the circulation of Blood, housing the mind, the storage of shen (spirit), the adaptation of the external world to one's internal environment, the capacity to feel joy, and the creative impulse.

There are 12 Organs which are paired. Their names and basic functions are as follows: Lung-Large Intestine: Respiration and Elimination; the capacity for change Stomach-Spleen: Digestion (of food and thoughts); the capacity for contemplation Heart-Small Intestine: Circulation of Blood; Adaptation (external to internal); Assimilation of food and thoughts; capacity for joy and creativity Bladder-Kidney: Purification and Endocrine function; storage of vital essence (jing); purification of Blood; willpower; the capacity to do Heart Constrictor-Triple Heater: Circulation of Blood to the peripheries; Protection (lymphatic function); the capacity for social intercourse Gall Bladder-Liver: Storage of Blood; Distribution of Ki (vital energy), nutrients, hormones; the capacity for moral decisions.

Meridians are the pathways along which Ki circulates throughout the body so that the Organ can perform its functions. Healthy functioning means that all systems are functioning well, and that we express the appropriate emotions and have a sense of joy in life.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis in Oriental Medicine follows the same general outline as in Western medicine (observations, questioning, listening and smelling, and palpation) but uses the information in different ways. The diagnosis will vary depending on what specific treatment modality is used (e.g. moxa heat, needles, pressure). Generally, the functional state of jing, shen, Ki, Blood, Fluids, and of each Organ pair and the meridians is evaluated.

The aim of Oriental Medicine is to diagnose the nature of imbalance in the person -- to discern the "pattern of disharmony", not to diagnose the name of a disease.

A typical diagnosis by a herbalist might be Dampness of the Spleen. Symptoms might include lack of appetite and taste, nausea, and fullness in the chest. Herbal treatment would be directed towards eliminating the dampness by prescribing herbs.

A typical diagnosis by a shiatsu therapist might be Deficiency of the Spleen Ki. Symptoms might include lack of appetite, no desire to exercise, continual worrying, and heaviness after eating. Shiatsu treatment would be directed towards toning or strengthening the Ki of the Spleen through the application of pressure to the body.

Treatment Diagnosis is the determination of the 'pattern of disharmony'. The aim of treatment is to help to restore harmony and balance to body-mind functions through the application of heat, needles, pressure, herbs etc. Treatment is directed at restoring balance to the body-mind, not at getting rid of the disease. When balance is restored, signs and symptoms of discomfort and illness usually disappear. Oriental Medicine is usually not a quick fix - often the main complaint seems not to change much through other aspects such as sleep and digestion may show changes. Usually the therapist is able to detect changes in the person's condition, though symptoms may remain. A person is considered healthy when there are no signs of disharmony or imbalance.

Therapies in Oriental Medicine

The major therapies in Oriental medicine are as follows:

SHIATSU

Japanese finger-pressure treatment - the application of comfortable, holding pressure with fingers, palms and elbows to the body to balance Ki.

TUI-NA

Chinese massage therapy - the application of moving pressure with the hands to the body to balance Ki.

ACUPUNCTURE

The insertion of needles to adjust Ki

HERBAL MEDICINE

The prescription of herbal remedies to normalize Organ functions and substances in the body (Ki, Jing, Blood, Fluids)

DIET

Food recommendations to balance fundamental substances and Organ functions

REMEDIAL EXERCISE

Self-exercises to move Ki, Blood, etc.

Illness is Goodness

In Oriental medicine, there is a saying "illness is goodness". Illness tells us that something is wrong - that something is not balanced in the body. Illness makes us STOP, and rest, and take steps to recover, to regain that inner balance. For example, when you get a cold, you stay at home and rest until you recover. As you rest with your illness, you think about why you got sick - are you working too much? are you neglecting to play? are you eating poor quality food? Illness gives us a chance to think about what needs to be changed, and it gives us the chance to change, to modify the things that are causing the imbalance.

Illness also shows us that the body is working to regain its balance. So, the next time you get sick, pay attention to what your body-mind-spirit is telling you. Think about what needs to be changed in your life, and what you are able to change. Health is a balance - illness is a signal of imbalance, and of the body's actions to regain that balance.

