

General practice

In Chinese medicine, general practice is called “internal medicine” because it treats everything except for problems occurring on the skin (so skin problems, pimples, boils, cuts and burns are all part of “external medicine”).

The conditions listed below are the problems we see most often, but of course it is hard to list everything. If you do not see your particular problem discussed here, contact us to see if we can help, or if there is another clinic more appropriate for that specific thing.

Pains including pain from headaches, lower backache, abdominal pain and joint pains and aches are treated with herbs and, if necessary, acupuncture. In some cases techniques for home pain relief may be taught, such as moxibustion. Stiff neck and shoulders can be helped with acupuncture and cupping, but can often be prevented by *not going out in the morning with wet hair*. Your mother was right, for once.

Headaches include migraines and other stubborn headaches for which other treatments have not been effective. Often the reason is that there are several causative factors intertwined, and these need to be teased out, unravelled and eliminated before the headaches stop completely. Unexplained vertigo and dizziness usually respond quite well to either acupuncture or herbal treatment. Sinus may also cause headache (see Respiratory disorders below).

Abdominal pain can also be very complicated in terms of its causative factors. Chinese medicine is particularly useful when Western examinations are unable to identify the cause of the pain, because we use a different set of parameters (more specific attention to the nature and timing of the pain, for example, in conjunction with other relevant information obtained through pulse and tongue diagnosis) to determine what is happening and how to treat it. In cases where there *is* a Western diagnosis, but no really viable Western treatment, again Chinese medicine can offer a way forward. This may include ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease. If there is any doubt your practitioner may take advantage of some of the diagnostic technology in which Western medicine is superior, such as ultrasound imaging, by asking for a second opinion through your GP. If the pain is gynaecological, patients will be referred to that department.

Digestive disorders commonly respond well to treatment. These include nausea, diarrhea, constipation, IBS, loss of appetite (or excessive appetite!), heartburn, reflux, burping, indigestion and hypoglycemia, for a short list of examples. If one’s digestive system is so weak that herbal treatments are not tolerated, a course of gentle acupuncture treatments may be used to gradually strengthen the ability to handle foods and herbs.

Tiredness and lethargy are not unusual, but can result from several factors. The practitioner will ask specific questions to ascertain the nature and reason for the lethargy, and prescribe the appropriate remedy. You do not have to be tired all the time! Before your first consultation, however, ask yourself “*When* am I tired?” and “*Where* am I tired?” If you can’t tell, don’t worry; but if you do know what time of

day you feel worse, and where around the body or head you feel tired, the treatment will be more focussed, effective and rapid.

Chronic fatigue or post-viral syndrome will need longer treatment, although results are often felt immediately. Patients *must not* try to push through their fatigue, but must rather stop and rest for a time; if this advice is heeded, improvement is much more rapid.

Tiredness sometimes stems from the eyes – if eyes are dry, sore, red and excessively watery, or if there is a twitch around the eyelids, we can use herbs to sip and wash the eyes. Chrysanthemum tea is an excellent daily tea that in China is used to “brighten the eyes” – it is also cooling in the summertime.

Respiratory problems are another area where Chinese herbs obtain excellent results (although, as in all health conditions the longer the problem has persisted, the longer treatment may take). Records of successful treatment methods for symptoms such as sensations of tightness in the chest, difficulty breathing, cough, shortness of breath and sinus problems stretch back to 210AD, starting with the first clinical handbook of Chinese medicine, the *Shang Han Lun* (Discussion of Cold Disorders). Of its 113 formulas, we still use over 100 in daily practice.

Sinus and hayfever may seem minor, but can often be quite debilitating. Herbs to inhale are used to clear the head, then sipped to break up the phlegm. Acupuncture too is very effective.

Common cold, 'flu and other viral conditions are both preventable and treatable with herbs (again the earlier the better). If you can't afford to be sick, get it treated – don't just suffer at home. Prevention is easier – ask your practitioner for advice about what to do when you have that very first inkling that you have “caught something.” If you find yourself “catching something” very often, the first thing to do is *stop going out in the morning with wet hair*. A long-standing observation in Chinese medicine has been that evaporation from the nape of the neck leads to a physically localised drop in temperature, and this temperature differential invokes a series of responses that result in a lowered immunity to local pathogens. We can also give some specific herbs to help, and teach a Chinese point percussion technique that one can use with daily stretching and exercise.

Urinary problems (including urinary tract infections (UTI) that are no longer responsive to antibiotic treatment) stress incontinence, nocturia and enuresis all respond to herbs and/or acupuncture, although in this area particularly the more chronic the problem the longer it will take to fix. Interstitial cystitis can eventually improve, but is notoriously hard to remedy in the impatient.

Insomnia, loss of concentration and focus, sensations of anxiety or jumpiness – In Chinese medicine these are not immediately labelled “psychological.” Our maxim is “First bring the body back into balance, then the mind will often settle into harmony.” We feel there is too much of a rush these days to label as “depressed” someone who simply wakes up tired, groggy and unmotivated early in the morning. Usually this type of patient will have the thought “I don't *feel* depressed, but the doctor told me I am, so I guess I must be!”

Further Study

The *Shang Han Lun* was published in 210 AD, and has been an important clinical handbook for every Chinese medicine practitioner ever since. Of course, in many areas Chinese medicine has progressed far beyond that time, but the formulas contained in this book remain remarkably precise and effective for today's diseases. Out of 113 formulas in the original text, we still use 100 of them!

Here is a link to the best English translation (just for reference – patients do *not* need to buy this book).

http://www.amazon.com/Shang-Han-Lun-Translation-Commentaries/dp/0912111577/sr=8-1/qid=1162020915/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/002-5957765-8385648?ie=UTF8&s=books