




Getting the Point

The Women's Clinic @ Uxbridge Newsletter Spring 2004/Winter 2003

Stepping into Spring



How did you feel when the clocks went forward last month? Many people comment that they feel better now the evenings are lighter. All around us are the burgeoning energy and new growth of Spring. It is natural for us to respond to this huge shift in energy by feeling more positive and energetic, and ready to let some fresh air into our homes and lives.

Many of us, though, feel we are dragging our feet, out of step with the new season. Having struggled through the winter months with an undiminished workload, lacking in opportunities to rest and restore our energies, we can find ourselves out of tune with spring, suffering from hayfever, lingering tiredness and colds. With this in mind, we have included some suggestions for boosting your energy that don't require much effort.

IN THIS ISSUE

- ☺ Stepping into spring
- ☺ A lifestyle change for spring
- ☺ Spring and your Liver
- ☺ Coughs, sneezes, hayfever
- ☺ Headaches and migraine
- ☺ Acupuncture and cancer
- ☺ Menopause
- ☺ How long will I need treatment?
- ☺ Male infertility

A Lifestyle Change for Spring

Lifestyle plays an important part in our health. Traditional Eastern cultures prize a long healthy life and emphasise daily practices that contribute to longevity.

As we respond to the surging energies of spring, it is easy to forget the importance of taking regular rest. Rest allows the body to nourish itself and recharge its vital energies. Many cultures recognise the need for this, and the siesta is part of the daily routine. How sad that so many of us in Britain are chained to the office desk, hardly taking time to grab a sandwich!

Here is a very good practice for revitalising and nourishing the Qi. Lie down for 10 to 20 minutes, between the hours of 1pm and 3 pm. Do not read, or watch television, as it is important to rest the eyes. You do not need to fall asleep; just maintain a restful state. It's simple!

Many people dislike the idea of taking a nap in the afternoon. The object of this exercise is not to sleep, but to "recharge the batteries". The challenge is to find the time and opportunity to make this exercise a part of your daily routine. If you are working, try to practice it at weekends. If you are at home during the week, attempt to implement it as a daily practice.

Try it! Over time, you will find that your energy and concentration improve, that the quality of your sleep improves, and that many other symptoms disappear.

Spring and your Liver



In the Five Elements theory of Oriental medicine, Spring is said to be the time of the Liver. The Liver gives us the power to go forward through life. It is responsible for maintaining a smooth flow. It does this on a physical level by helping us to move easily and gracefully. It does this on an emotional level by helping us to know when to be assertive and when to yield appropriately. The energy of the Liver is like that of a tree that can sway in the wind whilst remaining firmly rooted. The Liver is also concerned with planning and organising, with taking things forward, with achieving our goals.

Spring is a particularly good time to pay your Liver some attention.

You can cleanse the Liver by incorporating small amounts of sour food into the daily diet. Try starting the day with a cup of hot water flavoured with a squeeze of lemon juice, or with some cider vinegar and honey. Mix olive oil with lemon juice and cayenne pepper, and use as a salad dressing or take in small doses as a Liver stimulant. Eat plenty of fresh, dark green vegetables. These have a mild sour taste that is beneficial to the Liver.

To avoid congesting the Liver, cut down on saturated fats, over-salted foods, processed foods, and over-sweetened foods. Eat moderately, especially rich or fatty foods. Incorporate moderate amounts of green salads and sprouted seeds into the diet.

Exercise and stretching are essential for the Liver energy. Walking purposefully is an easy activity to incorporate into our daily pattern, and is good for the Liver. You may have read in the papers recently that MPs, concerned about our levels of fitness and obesity, have been encouraged by health professionals to wear a pedometer and include at least

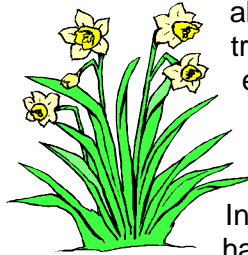
10,000 steps of brisk walking in their daily routine.

Be creative! Exercising our creative nature also nourishes the Liver, so indulge that desire to paint a picture, plant a garden, or create a dance!

Get plenty of rest and relaxation. The Liver's desire for activity needs to be balanced with the ability to take "time out". A short lie-down every day, as described above, will nourish the Liver and enhance your feelings of well-being.

Coughs, Sneezes, Hayfever

For many people, the arrival of Spring regularly heralds hayfever. Sufferers may have constant hot, burning, gritty eyes, nose and throat, sneezing, a running or blocked nose and watery eyes. This allergic response is triggered by every encounter with pollen from trees, grass and other plants.



In Chinese medicine, hayfever indicates a weakness of the Wei Qi (the defensive energy) which is largely produced by the Lung and Kidney energies. For prevention of hayfever, the best time to start a series of acupuncture treatments is in August/September, when the pollen season is coming to an end. This will strengthen the system in readiness for the following spring. (However, having treatment at other times of the year can help to manage and minimise the uncomfortable symptoms of hayfever.)

Preventative treatments for hayfever bring the added benefit of strengthening the system to ward off colds and flu. Strengthening the Wei Qi is the equivalent of developing the body's immune system. You can also prevent the possibility of contracting a spring cold by continuing to dress warmly and protect yourself from drafts. This can often be difficult when the warmth of spring invites us to take off those winter layers!

Headaches and Migraine



Headaches and migraine are a distressingly frequent experience for many people. An occasional headache may be a reaction to a temporary physical or emotional problem. Once serious conditions have been ruled out as a cause, severe or frequent headaches indicate a chronic imbalance.

Many people are unhappy relying on medication for headaches. If taken frequently, anti-inflammatories such as Nurofen can lead to gastrointestinal problems. Strong migraine medications such as Immigran have a generally depleting effect on our energy. People often find they need to be taken more and more frequently.

We are writing about headaches and migraines in Spring because in Chinese medicine this is the season of the Liver. Stagnant Liver energy is very often the cause of headaches and migraines; for example, severe headache with pain behind the eyes or blurred vision, possibly accompanied by nausea.

There are many other types of headache, each with a different energetic cause. Heaviness of the head, with poor concentration which is worse in the morning and improves as the day goes on is often related to digestive energy which has been weakened by an inappropriate diet and too much mental effort and worry.

In Chinese medicine, some of the factors that may contribute to headache are overwork, worry, diet, accidents, neck problems, strong emotions, to give just a few examples. This is why your practitioner will ask you in detail about all your symptoms, not just the headache. It is essential to treat the underlying condition, to balance the energy and eventually prevent headaches returning.

Advice will be given on changes to lifestyle and diet when these can make a significant difference.

Acupuncture and Cancer

Complementary therapies are used widely to support people with cancer both during and after their treatment. Of these, acupuncture provides significant health benefits at any stage of the cancer experience. It can be used to manage the shock of diagnosis, to minimise uncomfortable side effects of cancer treatment, and to support recovery after treatment.

Acupuncture can be used safely alongside conventional treatments. Studies have shown that it is effective in managing nausea and vomiting related to chemotherapy treatments, and in managing the hot flushes that may occur as a result of radiotherapy, chemotherapy or hormonal treatments. Acupuncture can also additionally help to reduce pain, improve energy, sleep and appetite, and as well as contributing to improving the overall sense of well being. Visiting an acupuncturist can also help people to manage the anxieties they feel when they are being treated for cancer.

It is also invaluable in helping in the recovery process once treatment has finished. In modern Western culture, we pay little heed to the body's need to recuperate after illness. A course of acupuncture can facilitate and support the body's healing processes. It can help to restore levels of energy, deal with post-treatment aches and pains, and aid the psychological and emotional processes of adjusting back to "normal" life.

If you are undergoing cancer treatment, or are dealing with the after-effects of treatment, do consider using acupuncture to help manage your health.



Menopause

The "menopause" is defined as 12 months after the last period (unless there is another reason why the periods have stopped). The time leading up to the menopause, when the function of the ovaries is declining and periods are becoming irregular, is often the time when some of the unpleasant symptoms associated with the menopause can be experienced (although these symptoms do sometimes continue for many years after the final period). The average age in Western societies for the menopause is 51 but it usually occurs between late 40's and mid 50's. Certain factors can affect the age of onset: smoking is generally expected to make it earlier, and obesity would make it later. It is a gradual process and a different experience for each woman.

Symptoms associated with menopause can include hot flushes, night sweats, headaches, lethargy, irritability, anxiety, depression, decreased libido, insomnia, lack of concentration, joint pain and vaginal dryness. Pre-menopausal women have lower rates of heart disease than men do, but this protection is lost after the menopause. One of the most serious noted effects is osteoporosis (loss of bone density and strength often resulting in fractures).



In modern society women's hormonal functions are often manipulated for many years; first of all with the contraceptive pill and then with HRT. For some time now there have been increasing concerns about the so-called side effects of these treatments. HRT, once seen as the magic answer to menopausal symptoms, is increasingly being seen as causing more problems than it solves. Recently, the Million Women Study indicated that HRT could double the risk of breast cancer and lead to heart problems. In the Women's Health Initiative (a major 15 year research programme into women's health), investigators stopped the oestrogen and

progesterone study after finding that the risks to health outweighed its benefits.

The Chinese view is that the menopause is a normal part of life, relating to a gradual decline in the Kidney energy. Many women do not experience unpleasant symptoms associated with the menopause. Their appearance relates to the pre-existing state of the Kidney energy (the Water element).

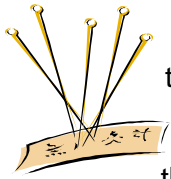
A woman's lifestyle and diet from childhood influence this onwards. A stressful life in the years leading up to the menopause, overwork, not enough rest and an irregular diet may all lead to the loss of the delicate balance between the Yin and Yang energy of the Kidney. To give one example, if the Yin of the Kidneys is not able to hold down Yang, then hot flushes and night sweats occur.

There is a general view in Chinese medicine that one's health can change significantly, for better or worse, at major times of change in life - such as the menopause. It is therefore essential to take extra care of oneself at these times. Acupuncture and Chinese herbs have been shown in various studies to be beneficial in minimising many of the menopausal symptoms, especially in relation to hot flushes, night sweats, anxiety and depression.

Using HRT is not a contraindication to using acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine as they work in different ways. While HRT tricks the body into believing that it is still ovulating, traditional acupuncture gently tonifies the Kidney energies. After two or three months of regular treatment with acupuncture and/or herbs, it is possible to discontinue HRT without any recurrence of symptoms.

Lifestyle changes can also help. Increasing weight-bearing exercise; reducing stimulants such as coffee, alcohol, sugar and hot spicy foods such as curries; including more soya products, oily fish, nuts and seeds; and taking good quality vitamin supplements.

How long will I need treatment?



When someone comes to see an acupuncturist for the first time, a common question is “how long will I need treatment?” Usually what this question means is, “how long will it take to get rid of the symptom that I came with?” This is a perfectly sensible question to ask, but one that can be quite difficult to answer.

Some conditions are known to respond well to acupuncture, while others are hard to treat. With serious or chronic illness, it may only be possible to alleviate some of the symptoms. There may also be a correlation between how long you have been unwell and the duration of treatment.

It is important to understand that traditional acupuncture is a holistic therapy. This means that our focus is on getting the whole person better, as well as giving relief from the presenting complaint. This makes sense to many people, as they are very aware of how their emotional and physical health are intertwined and of how their day to day life experiences and habits influence their health.

Most of us can identify some things we do that are not good for our health. Relying on coffee and cigarettes to get through the day, or eating sweet things for comfort when we feel down are just some examples. Unfortunately, for most of us simply being aware is not enough to stop us doing them! Being advised by a healthcare practitioner that you should make lifestyle changes can feel like far too much of a challenge, and leave you feeling guilty if you ignore the advice.

The good news is that, as acupuncture treatment progresses and your energy becomes more balanced, you will usually find that your overall health improves. You may sleep better, have more energy, and feel calmer and more positive. You may find that you no longer crave comfort food, or become more aware that too much coffee makes you feel anxious.

This is the stage at which people feel strong enough to make changes in their life style, in order to support and sustain improvements in health. Your acupuncturist can help you with this by giving advice on diet, exercise and other aspects of lifestyle.

With these positive lifestyle changes, you can expect to feel better for longer between treatments, and not need to have treatment so frequently. Part of the answer to the question “how long will I need treatment?” is, then, “It depends on you”. Understanding what contributes to keeping you in good health can feel very empowering.

It can also, though, feel like a heavy responsibility. Life today can be very stressful, and most of us are overloaded with responsibilities, so it can be quite difficult to make room in our lives to make changes.

It is important not to add to our problems with feelings of guilt for not looking after ourselves as well as we might. Your acupuncturist is always there to support you in whatever way best suits you and will always be glad to see you whenever you feel you need a “top up”.



*The 3 months of spring
Are called springing up and unfolding.
Heaven and Earth together produce life,
And the 10,000 beings are invigorated.*

*At night, one goes to bed, at dawn, one gets up.
One paces in the courtyard with great strides,
Hair loose, body at ease,
Exerting the will for life:
Letting live, not killing;
Giving, not taking away;
Rewarding, not punishing.*

*This corresponds
With the spring qi.
It is the way
That maintains the drive of life.*

(Su Wen, Chapter 2)

Male Infertility



Fifteen percent of couples suffer from primary infertility, defined as conception not taking place within a year of a couple starting normal unprotected sex. In 30% of cases of primary infertility, the cause lies with the male partner alone, and in 25-30% of cases, the cause is the couple together. This means that in about 50% of cases of primary infertility, the male partner is a contributing factor.

While there is little that Western medicine can do to improve male fertility, it is a little known fact that acupuncture can help to significantly improve the condition. A review of several studies carried out in China indicates that, overall, acupuncture is about 80% effective in treating aspects of male infertility. Among the specific conditions that can be successfully treated are low sperm count, diminished sperm motility (the speed and direction in which the sperm move), malformed sperm, and antisperm antibodies in the male. Impotence and problems with ejaculation also respond well to acupuncture.

A couple experiencing fertility problems should ensure that the male partner has more than one sperm test, ideally a few days apart. Full analyses are essential. It may also be beneficial for the male partner to have acupuncture treatment, even when the semen analysis appears to be normal. Treatment can improve the quality of the semen, and help to improve the chances of conception taking place.

In couples experiencing infertility, the male partner can also enhance the likelihood of conception by making appropriate lifestyle changes:

- Stop smoking cigarettes, cigars, and (especially) cannabis
- Avoid excessive alcohol consumption
- Avoid taking antibiotics
- Reduce weight if overweight
- Exercise regularly, but avoid too much vigorous exercise.

Brief periods (3 – 6 days) of abstinence from sex can increase sperm volume and motility. Coffee, too, appears to increase sperm motility.

When seeing an acupuncturist for infertility problems, make sure to bring a copy of the semen analysis. This can help with the diagnosis and treatment planning, and can also provide an objective measurement of the results of treatment. Expect to have regular treatment for at least 74 days, the length of time it takes for the formation of sperm.



THIS NEWSLETTER IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

Maggie Bavington, Liz Cook, Beverley de Valois and Stephanie McGrath. We are a group of practitioners who are members of the British Acupuncture Council. We practice both the Five Element and Traditional Chinese Medicine styles of acupuncture. We are all committed to ongoing supervision and training and sharing insights from our particular specialities in the interest of better care for our patients. These currently include women's health, pain relief, musculo-skeletal conditions, addiction and detox and acupuncture research.

The Women's Clinic @ Uxbridge

Beverley de Valois MA MIFPA MBACc

For appointments, information on clinic hours, or information about treatment call:

07791 913 624

**Book a free 15-minute appointment
now
to discuss how The Women's Clinic
can help you**

Or visit the website at:

www.womens-clinic.co.uk