



Nourishing the Yin: Ancient Healing for Women

by Shoshanna Katzman

Chinese medicine has a long history of specialized treatment for a multitude of women's health problems. The famous Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine written 2,000 years ago contains information about anatomy, physiology, diagnosis and treatment specific to women. Since that time, Chinese medicine as applied to gynecology, obstetrics and reproductive treatments has continued to grow and has now become a highly developed holistic paradigm for the health and healing of women.

A major component of this approach to women's health involves an analysis of the state of blood flowing throughout the body. There is an ancient saying that "women take blood as primary" — stemming from the monthly loss of blood that takes place during menstruation. In fact, Chinese medicine views women as generally being in a blood deficient state. However, it also sees women as having an excessive amount of vital energy or qi. Interestingly, this is the opposite of what is true for men. Regardless of gender, when qi and blood are balanced and flowing

freely vibrant health is the result.

Analysis of an individual's levels of qi and blood is the major focus of Chinese medicine diagnosis and treatment approach. Qi and blood are so mutually dependent that they are often seen as one. More specifically, blood is said to be the mother of qi and qi is the mover of blood. When qi and blood are ample, balanced and flowing smoothly it leads to healthy menstruation, fertility, and menopause in addition to peak vital organ function — all leading to optimal health and well-being. Additionally, this reduces incidence of pain based on the well-known Chinese medicine saying "if there is free flow, there is no pain. If there is pain, there is no free flow".

According to the Yin Yang Theory, women are more of a yin nature and men are more yang - whereby yin relates to blood, internal, water, cold, and darkness, and yang relates to energy, external, dryness, and heat. Health is maintained and sustained by balancing energy to exist more toward the center of the continuum of yin and yang. Acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, Chinese

dietary therapy, Chinese exercises and lifestyle recommendations are employed singularly or in combination to bring the yin and yang energies into balance to restore health and vitality. These treatments furthermore lessen the likelihood for a preponderance of heat (yang) to dry blood or water (yin) of the body; or for an excess amount of water (yin) to dampen the fire (yang) of the body.

According to Chinese medicine numerous lifestyle habits and medical factors contribute to imbalances of yin, yang, blood and qi. In terms of women's health, these include multiple births or miscarriages, excessive sex, trauma, injury, overwork, insufficient rest and sleep, heavy exercise, infections, nutritional deficiency and overconsumption of cold raw foods. Excessive emotions such as worry, pensiveness, anger, grief and fear are furthermore considered to be an internal cause of disease due to their negative effect on qi and blood flow as well as proper vital organ function. In addition, environmental factors such as excessive dampness, heat and cold are said to penetrate the body and then become

external causes of disease because they impede the normal and balanced energetic and blood flow throughout the body.

Chinese medicine to treat women predominantly involves the energetic pathways or meridians of the kidney, spleen and liver. All three run through the pelvic area and can potentially impact gynecological, reproductive and obstetric health. Treatment of the kidney meridian is applied to promote growth, development and reproduction and to "spark the energy" of all vital organs. The liver meridian is closely related to the uterus and treated to enhance storage of blood in ample amounts and smooth flow of qi throughout the body. Whereas, the spleen meridian is closely associated with digestion and treated to enhance transformation and transportation of food, which in turn leads to increased amounts of qi and blood. The spleen also holds blood and maintains its circulation within the blood vessels. Blockage, deficiency, or stagnation of vital energy within each of these meridians is a common root cause of women's health issues.

As in every situation, treatment is determined according to an individual's presenting symptoms and signs along with their particular constitution which becomes the foundation for a Chinese medicine diagnosis. The ultimate goal is to restore proper flow of blood and qi to bring the body back into balance and to create vibrant health. This approach to women's health is holistic, taking into consideration all aspects of a woman's medical history, life experience, dietary habits, exercise regime, emotional state and stress levels in addition to their energetic and physical predisposition. This provides a way to change the course of how vital energy and blood work together to nourish and sustain life – a highly effective way to release unwanted symptoms and welcome a revitalized mind, body and spirit connection.

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