

Tune Up for the Winter



Receiving acupuncture at the change of seasons has been recommended for centuries

by Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., M.S.

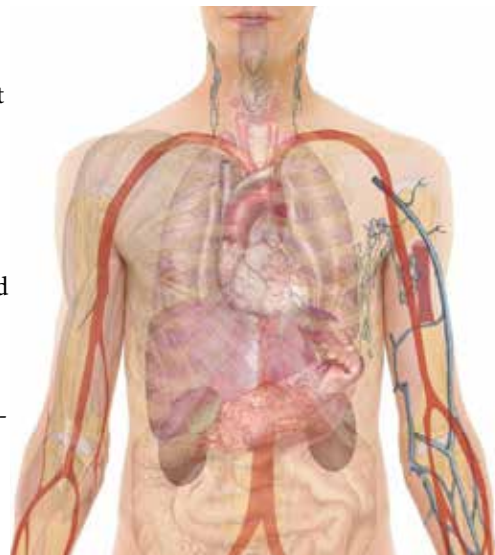
Receiving acupuncture at the change of seasons has been recommended for centuries as a preventative measure to ensure health and well-being. Such treatments are commonly known as “acupuncture tune-ups” – providing a way to keep the body in good working order. This is achieved through balancing the flow of qi (vital energy) and the energetic forces of yin and yang. The need for seasonal tune-ups stems from the Law of the Five Elements which designates a direct association between each season and particular organ systems. Within this paradigm, winter is associated with the kidney and bladder – a time when their energies are more vulnerable to becoming imbalanced.

An acupuncturist helps patients achieve long-lasting health of these organ

systems through strategic insertion of acupuncture needles along their associated meridian pathways. Tuning up kidney qi serves to boost energy within the body, enhancing ability to jump out of bed in the morning, which isn't always the easiest thing to do in the dead of winter. Balancing kidney energy also leads to a strong back, sturdy knees, pristine hearing and ample hair on the head. And keeping bladder qi balanced enhances its role as “minister of the reservoir” to receive liquid waste from the kidneys, then storing and expelling it from the body. Balanced qi of the bladder also strengthens decision-making and boosts moral character. Moreover, it switches the autonomic nervous system into its parasympathetic mode, thereby promoting relaxation and restoring body-mind harmonization.

The kidneys and bladder energy systems further represent winter's primary element of water – one associated with the virtue of wisdom and emotion of fear. Fear is deeply rooted, with a healthy modest amount being protective and keeping a person from foolhardiness. However, when fear is excessive, it fosters insecurity and injures kidney and bladder energy. A winter tune-up eliminates chance of this happening by lifting the weight of fear. Acupuncture winter tune-ups also focus on nourishing yin energy. Going into a deep state of healing during an acupuncture session is an excellent way to nourish yin through self-reflection. It also builds healing energy within the kidneys for the winter season. Storage of essential nutrients is another preventative measure, similar to how squirrels store nuts for the winter. Foods that fortify the kidneys include barley, tofu, string beans, asparagus, all dark colored beans, seaweeds, warm hearty soups, roasted nuts, dark fruits such as blackberry and blueberry – along with fish, eggs, dairy, duck and pork.

Chinese medicine holds additional lifestyle recommendations for unifying with the natural yin spirit of winter. The work of cultivating yin is quiet in nature and leads to self-acceptance, inner calm and “simply being.” This means learning how to shift into a more internal and receptive state of being. Ways to foster these abilities include taking deep breaths and reminding oneself to be totally in the moment – along with carving out time to relax throughout the day. Taking pause is a powerful method for reflecting and taking stock of oneself. Valuable insight is further



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gained through daily meditation by sitting or standing quietly and concentrating on a single word or concept. And there is nothing better than receiving a therapeutic massage as a much needed thank you to your physical body. Not to mention how much a massage invokes deep relaxation and inner calm. This can also be brought forth through cozying up with a good book or listening to music.

Although slowing oneself down is needed during winter, it is important to stay active to keep the body supple. Practicing yoga, tai chi and/or qigong are excellent ways to achieve this goal. These ancient exercises promote meditation through movement. In addition, taking a walk around the neighborhood, in the woods or along the ocean provides good exercise along with the much-needed act of quieting the mind. Keep these ideas and suggestions in the forefront of your mind as you head into winter. Enjoy the process and become attuned to the unique rhythm of this special time of year. And remember to commune with nature both around and within you – bringing you into a deeper sense of inner peace and well-being.

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