



Acupuncture and Stress

Signs and symptoms of an overactive response to stress:

- Anger
- Depression
- Headaches
- Joint pain
- Anxiety
- Depressed immune system
- Heart disease
- Weight problems
- Asthma
- Digestive disorders
- High blood pressure

In ancient times, our stress response, also known as our fight or flight response, provided us with energy to preserve life during difficult situations such as an attack or threat by a wild animal. Today, we don't have to look much further than our windows, or computer screens, to view various forms of stressors-everything from prime-time news and road rage, to the 40 hour work week, terrorism talk, and cell phones. All of these combine to send even the most serene people into a stressful frenzy.

Unfortunately, modern day stress is considerably higher, more frequent and more consistent than what our predecessors experienced. Over time this excess stress can actually be detrimental to our health. Our body's natural response to stressful situations is to activate all available resources for survival, and to get us out of a scary situation fast. However, with the increase in physical, emotional and mental stressors, our stress response gets "locked in", resulting in the depletion of the body's resources.

Even if the stressors are no longer present, the body continues to keep the stress response active. This results in the depletion of our nervous system; lymphatic organs (spleen, thymus, and lymph nodes), kidneys and adrenal glands, and can pave the way for a wide variety of symptoms and signs. Medical studies have shown that with increased and consistent stress, our white blood cells, which defend our body against viruses, decrease. This decrease results in lower immune resistance, ultimately leading to physical disease and emotional instability.

THERE IS HOPE Practitioners of acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) have been helping people cope with stress for thousands of years. The ancient theories of TCM on how stress affects the body organs are similar to those of Western medicine; however, TCM theory and treatment go far beyond treating symptoms and signs.

Along with treating physical and emotional symptom and signs associated with stress, this ancient medicine addresses the root cause(s) of the problem. One way that stress affects the body is by causing a depletion or blockage of Qi, especially that of the Kidneys and adrenals.

Qi (pronounced "chee") is the energy or the power that animates and supports the functions of the body. It flows through specific pathways, called meridians, and provides nourishment for the entire body. When Qi becomes "blocked" or the supply is inadequate, the body and organ systems become "stressed out" and our health is then compromised.

With acupuncture and TCM, the practitioner's job is to support and restore the integrity of the various organs affected and depleted by the stress response, along with evaluating the quality and quantity of Qi.

Your acupuncturist may also suggest adjunct therapies to enhance treatment, and speed healing. Proper eating habits, as well as the use of exercise, stretching, movement and meditation practices, support and promote a balanced and healthy body, mind and spirit.