



ALASKA CENTER FOR ACUPUNCTURE

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Staying Healthy During Flu Season with Chinese Medicine

It's cold and flu season again, and Acupuncture and Chinese medicine offer a unique perspective that can help you and your family stay healthy this winter.

On the surface, colds and flu are one area where Western and Eastern theories seem to agree. Both systems recognize that a pathogen, or disease causing factor, has entered the body from the outside to cause the illness. However, whereas Western medicine calls this pathogen a virus, the Chinese would say that the sick person has an "invasion of wind."

Wind is simply a force from the outside that has temporarily overwhelmed the sick person's immune system. Back in the days when Chinese medicine was developed, over 3,000 years ago, there were no sophisticated diagnostic techniques – blood tests, cultures, antibody tests etc. - to determine external causes of illness. Instead, the Chinese learned to differentiate illness by looking at the individual's signs and symptoms, and they developed a treatment strategy from there.

For example, a cold that comes on slowly accompanied by a runny nose, scratchy throat and runny eyes with clear mucus, no fever and an aversion to cold would be called an invasion of "wind cold". On the other hand, a cold that comes on fast, and is accompanied by fever, sweating, and yellow mucus in the nose and lungs would be called an invasion of "wind heat".

Also, symptoms in the nose and throat and eyes are considered to be more superficial, whereas symptoms that have affected the lungs, digestive system, and inner ear generally indicate that the pathogen has penetrated more deeply into the body.

Based on the type, depth and severity of symptoms, an acupuncturist can also make a determination of the relative strength of the sick person's immune system versus the strength of the pathogen that invaded.

Whereas the goal of many over-the-counter pharmaceuticals is to temporarily alleviate symptoms – dry up a runny nose, suppress a cough, drop a fever etc. - the goal of Acupuncture and Chinese medicine is to help the body eliminate the pathogen. And this can be done without the side effects generally associated with cold medicine, such as drowsiness, dry mouth and irritability.

Cold symptoms are the body's immune system mounting a defense against an illness that has entered the system. A change in the body's internal and external state makes conditions less hospitable to the virus. The scratchy throat and runny nose of the initial stages of a cold are the body's attempt to keep a virus from entering deeper. So, a medicine that dries mucus can actually help the virus penetrate more deeply and cause more serious symptoms that last longer.

Acupuncturists see cold and flu symptoms as the body's attempt to push the pathogen out of the body. Treatment is aimed at strengthening the immune system and actually helping the pathogen to exit the body before it creates a serious illness.

In our experience, patients who get treatment at the beginning stages of a cold – when it is most superficial – will often walk out of our office feeling like the cold is completely gone.

Of course the goal of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine is always prevention. Patients who receive regular Acupuncture treatment report that they get sick less frequently than they used to. If you know that you are someone who suffers from frequent colds and flu, it's best to do a consultation before you start getting sick.

Besides receiving regular Acupuncture treatments, here are a few recommendations to help keep your immune system strong for the coming season.

1. The Chinese say that wind pathogens enter the body from the back of the neck at the base of the skull – so keep your neck covered, especially in cold and windy weather.
2. Make sure to get enough rest – most people need more sleep in the winter, this will keep your immune system strong.
3. Warming foods such as fresh garlic and ginger also support a strong immune system.
4. Avoid eating cold meals. Instead of cold cereal, have oatmeal. Instead of salad, have soup.
5. Visit our website for more articles and tips about how to stay healthy in the winter.

Samantha Berg and Kevin Meddleton are licensed acupuncturists who own Alaska Center for Acupuncture in downtown Palmer. Call 745-8688 for more information or visit on the web at www.AlaskaAcupuncture.com