

Alternative Medicine: Growing Trend for the New Millennium

Save to myBoK

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Please note that the information contained in this article concerning alternative medicine treatments and their underlying principles and theories is provided for educational purposes only. It does not represent a position of either AHIMA or the author regarding the efficacy or scientific validity of these treatments.

The results of a national survey of trends in the use of alternative therapies concluded that alternative medicine use and expenditures in the US increased substantially between 1990 and 1997. This increase was attributed primarily to a rise in the proportion of the population seeking alternative therapies (as opposed to an increase in the number of alternative medicine visits per patient). According to this survey, at least one of 16 alternative therapies increased from 33.8 percent in 1990 to 42.1 percent in 1997. The types of therapies that showed the greatest increase in use were herbal medicine, massage, megavitamins, self-help groups, folk remedies, energy healing, and homeopathy. Alternative therapies were used most frequently for chronic conditions, including back problems, anxiety, depression, and headaches. Between 1990 and 1997, there was a 47.3 percent increase in the total number of visits to alternative medicine providers. In 1997, an estimated four in 10 Americans used at least one alternative therapy, as compared with three in 10 in 1990. An estimated 90 percent of patients using alternative medical care are not referred by their physicians; they are seeking alternative medicine providers on their own. In 1997, 18.4 percent of all prescription users also used herbal remedies and/or high-dose vitamins in addition to their prescription medications. Estimated expenditures for alternative medicine professional services increased 45.2 percent between 1990 and 1997. For 1997, total expenditures for alternative medicine professional services were estimated at \$21.2 billion.¹

The increasing popularity of alternative medicine reflects changing needs and values in our society. These include a rise in the prevalence of chronic disease, an increase in public access to global health information, an increased sense of entitlement to a quality life, and a declining faith that scientific breakthroughs will affect the course of one's own illness. There is a growing realization that conventional medicine cannot solve all of our health problems. Acceptance that health is more than just the absence of disease and involves more than just the physical body is also growing. Concern about adverse effects and increasing costs of conventional healthcare are fueling the search for alternative approaches to the prevention and management of diseases. There is a growing body of scientific research demonstrating that many alternative medical treatments are more effective, more economical, less invasive, and less harmful than conventional medical treatments.

As consumer demands for alternative therapies escalate, the pressure on payers to provide coverage for these services has also increased. Many employers and insurers, including several major managed care organizations, reimburse for some types of alternative therapies. In fact, some state legislatures have enacted laws requiring health insurers to include alternative treatments in the benefits they cover.

Increased use of alternative therapies has also put pressure on conventional healthcare practitioners (such as physicians) to learn more about these therapies and, in some cases, to offer some of these alternative therapies to their patients. An ever-increasing number of physicians are becoming genuinely interested in practicing alternative medicine. The growing demand for physicians who will recommend alternative medicine remedies has prompted many medical schools to increase the number of alternative medicine courses they offer. A recent survey of 117 medical schools by researchers at Harvard Medical School found that 64 percent had elective courses in alternative therapies or covered these treatments in required courses. A similar survey conducted two years previously found that only 39 percent of medical schools offered courses in alternative medicine.

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The 1999 Omnibus appropriations bill, signed by President Clinton on October 21, 1998, established the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, which was formerly called the Office of Alternative Medicine. The Office of Alternative Medicine was originally established in 1991 to serve as a coordinating center within the Office of Director at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The office was mandated to facilitate the evaluation of alternative medical treatment modalities through coordinated research projects and other initiatives in conjunction with the NIH's Institutes and Centers. The primary role of the Office of Alternative Medicine during the past several years has been to place greater emphasis on the rigorous scientific evaluation of complementary and alternative medicine treatments, develop a solid infrastructure to coordinate and conduct research at the NIH, and establish a clearinghouse to provide information to the public. The establishment of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine and its appropriated budget of \$50 million in fiscal year 1999 provides greater autonomy to initiate research projects at a time when the public is increasingly interested in complementary and alternative medicine therapies. The purpose of the center is to conduct basic and applied research, provide research training, and disseminate health information and other programs with respect to identifying, investigating, and validating complementary and alternative medical treatments, diagnostic and preventive modalities, disciplines, and systems.

What is Alternative Medicine?

There is no clear, standard definition of "alternative medicine." One definition states that alternative medicine "incorporates all health systems, modalities, and practices other than those intrinsic to the politically dominant health system of a particular society or culture and includes all practices and ideas self-defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well-being."² Alternative medicine has also been defined as "medical interventions not taught widely at US medical schools or generally available at US hospitals."³ In 1996, the National Library of Medicine and the MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) Term Working Group, Office of Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health, classifies alternative medicine as "an unrelated group of non-orthodox therapeutic practices, often with explanatory systems that do not follow conventional biomedical explanations."

Alternative therapies include, but are not limited to, the following disciplines: Chinese traditional medicine, acupuncture, herbal medicine, homeopathy, ayurvedic medicine, chiropractic medicine, naturopathy, massage, and music therapy.

Much of what is labeled alternative medicine comes from other cultures or from ancient healing traditions. For example, the use of herbs as medicine is an ancient practice found all over the world. However, other alternative medicines, such as chiropractic medicine, naturopathic medicine (as a formal system of medicine), and osteopathy, originated in the US.

Principles of Alternative Medicine

Alternative medicine is based on several underlying principles, including:

- a deep belief in the healing power of nature first, technique and technology second
- patient-centered treatment
- using the least invasive or harmful treatments and therapies first
- results that generally take longer to go into effect with conventional treatments (since one primary goal of alternative medicine is to stimulate the body's natural healing response and let nature take its course)
- whole or natural substances promote healing better than synthetic drugs
- health being a dynamic process that is more than just the absence of illness

Complementary Medicine

The popularity of alternative medicine as complementary treatment has grown in popularity. In complementary medicine, alternative medical treatments are used as an adjunct to, rather than as a replacement for, conventional treatments.

Integrative Medicine

Unlike complementary medicine, which emphasizes the use of nonconventional treatments as an adjunct to conventional medicine, integrative medicine seeks to utilize whatever modalities and treatments are the most effective for treating the healthcare needs of the patient.

Types of Alternative Medicine

While not an all-inclusive list, the remainder of part one -- and much of part two -- of this article describe several forms of alternative medicine.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a family of therapeutic techniques involving manipulation of fine, solid, metallic needles inserted into specific points on the skin's surface. Acupuncture also includes application of heat, pressure, magnetism, electricity, laser, or moxibustion (burning of herbs to stimulate acupuncture points) at these same points. Acupuncture has been a component of Chinese medicine for more than 2500 years.

The intent of acupuncture is to promote good health and alleviate pain and suffering. Acupuncturists view health and illness from a perspective involving concepts such as vital energy, energetic balance, and energetic imbalance. The goal is to adjust the vital energy so the proper amount reaches the proper place at the proper time.

Acupuncture is based on the assumption that *qi* (pronounced chee) courses through the body in a similar fashion to streams and rivers coursing across the surface of the earth. Every organ network has a corresponding set of channels. Just as conventional medicine involves monitoring the blood flowing through blood vessels and messages traveling via the nervous system, acupuncturists assess the flow and distribution of vital energy within pathways called meridians and channels. The acupuncture points are located in small depressions in the skin called "men" or "gates" where the channels come closest to the surface. When acupuncture is performed, the gates of the body are opened and closed to adjust circulation in the channels and expel noxious influences from them. Thin, solid, sterile, stainless steel acupuncture needles are inserted into acupuncture points to communicate from the outside to the inside. Acupuncture mobilizes *qi*, moisture, and blood, which promotes proper function of the muscles, nerves, vessels, glands, and organs (see the section on [Chinese Traditional Medicine](#)).

For diseases of the channels and collaterals, the principle of treatment is to select the local points (*ah shi* points or acupuncture points) as well as a distal point on the channel that crosses the painful area. Back *shu* and front *mu* points represent the surface points of the internal organs (the *shu* points are on the back and the *mu* points are on the front). If the *zang* organs are diseased, the back *shu* points are particularly effective, whereas if the *fu* organs are diseased, the front *mu* points are useful.

Despite considerable efforts to understand the anatomy and physiology of acupuncture points, the definition and characterization of these points remain controversial. The mechanism by which acupuncture works is not yet understood. There are a number of theories, such as:

- The gate theory of pain: This theory states that there are specific nerve fibers that transmit pain to the spinal cord for which the input of other nerve fibers inhibits the transmission of that pain. Both of these groups of fibers meet at the substantia gelatinosa, a kind of "micro-chip" in the spinal cord. The substantia gelatinosa is responsible for the integration of painful and pain-inhibitory stimuli. If the pain input is excessive, message of pain is transmitted up the spinal cord to the brain, which perceives it as pain. Pain fibers are probably the bare nerve endings found in the skin and other superficial tissues. This theory proposes a balance between stimulation of the pain fibers and inhibition of the stimulus, so that pain is perceived only if the pain input overrides the inhibition of pain.

Acupuncture excites the pain-inhibitory nerve fibers for a short period of time, thereby blocking pain. But the effects of acupuncture can last for some months after the acupuncture needle has been removed, a prolonged effect that is not adequately explained by the gate theory.

- Endorphins: Morphine-like substances discovered in the central nervous system, endorphins -- naturally-occurring morphines -- were found to be very effective pain blockers. Endorphins are released into the nervous system by acupuncture, and the effects of acupuncture anesthesia can be reversed by the use of anti-morphine drugs.

However, not all types of acupuncture are blocked by anti-morphines. The effects of acupuncture can be very fast (in terms of seconds) and the release of chemicals may be too slow a process to cause such a fast action.

Neither of these theories attempts to address the effects of acupuncture when used to treat diseases other than those causing pain.

Acupuncture has been used by millions of Americans and performed by thousands of physicians, dentists, acupuncturists, and other healthcare practitioners for the relief or prevention of pain and for a variety of medical conditions. The World Health Organization lists a variety of medical conditions that may benefit from the use of acupuncture. These include prevention and treatment of nausea and vomiting, treatment of pain, addictions to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, treatment of pulmonary problems (e.g., asthma and bronchitis), and rehabilitation from neurological damage (e.g., damage due to stroke).

The US Food and Drug Administration removed acupuncture needles from the category of "experimental medical devices" and now regulates them just as it does other devices, such as surgical scalpels and hypodermic syringes.

A majority of states provide licensure or registration for acupuncture practitioners. The requirements to obtain licensure vary widely and there is variation in the titles conferred through credentialing and licensing examinations. The scope of practice also varies widely from state to state.

Aromatherapy

Aromatherapy involves the use of aromatic oils extracted from plants for therapeutic purposes. Although the use of fragrances goes back thousands of years, the term "aromatherapy" was coined in the early 1900s by a French chemist who burned his hand and placed it in a container of lavender oil. He was amazed at how quickly his hand healed. In World War II, oils such as thyme, clove, lemon, and chamomile were used on burns and other wounds.

Essential oils are obtained from plant sources (flower, leaf, resin, bark, root, twig, seed, berry, rind) by steam instillation, infusion, or extraction with an inert or carrier oil such as grapeseed, jojoba, or sweet almond oil. Essential oils are used therapeutically in cosmetics and massage lotions. They are also directly inhaled or emitted through a diffuser or candle that disperses scents into the atmosphere.

Only about 5 percent of the essential oils produced today are used in aromatherapy. Essential oils include muscle relaxants (marjoram and black pepper), digestive tonics (cardamom and mint), circulatory stimulants (rosemary and basil), and hormone precursors (clary sage and fennel). Oils are used to repair injured cells, help carry away metabolic waste, and enhance immunity. Some essential oils are used to fight fungal, yeast, viral, and bacterial infections. It is thought that they may be effective in treating bacterial infections by slightly lowering the pH of the blood, thus creating an inhospitable environment for bacteria.

Aromatherapy is often used in conjunction with, rather than as a replacement for, conventional medical treatments.

Ayurvedic Medicine

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word meaning the science of life. Ayurveda originated in India more than 5000 years ago. The aim of Ayurveda is to maintain or restore health by enabling one to understand one's own constitution and modify one's diet and lifestyle accordingly. It places great emphasis on prevention and encourages health maintenance by paying close attention to balance in one's life through right thinking, diet, lifestyle, and herbs. According to Ayurveda, each person has a particular pattern of energy (just as everyone has a unique fingerprint), which is an individual combination of physical, mental, and emotional characteristics. This combination of characteristics makes up one's constitution, which is determined at conception by a number of factors and remains the same throughout one's life. Many factors, both internal and external, act upon us to disturb this balance and are reflected as a change in one's constitution from the balanced state. These factors include one's emotional state, diet, seasons and weather, physical trauma, and work and family relationships. Once these factors that can cause imbalance are understood, one can take appropriate actions to nullify or minimize their effects or eliminate the causes. Balance is the natural order and imbalance is disorder. Within the body, there is a constant interaction between order and disorder. Ayurveda does not focus on disease. Rather, it maintains that all life must be supported by energy in balance. When

there is minimal stress and the flow of energy within a person is balanced, the body's natural defense systems will be strong and can more easily defend against disease.

Ayurveda identifies three basic types of energy or functional principles that are present in everyone and everything. Since no English words exist to describe these principles, the Sanskrit words are used: *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. Together, these three forces are known as the tridoshas. Energy is required to create movement so that fluids and nutrients get to the cells, enabling the body to function. Energy is also required to metabolize the nutrients in the cells and to lubricate and maintain cellular structure. *Vata* is the energy of movement, *pitta* is the energy of digestion or metabolism, and *kapha* is the energy of lubrication and structure. Everyone has *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*, but one is usually primary, one is secondary, and the third is least prominent. The cause of disease in Ayurveda is viewed as the lack of proper cellular function because of an excess or deficiency of *vata*, *pitta*, or *kapha* and/or the presence of toxins. In Ayurveda, the body, mind, and consciousness work together in maintaining balance. They are simply viewed as different facets of one's being.

According to Ayurvedic philosophy, the entire cosmos is an interplay of the energies of the five great elements -- space, air, fire, water, and earth. In the physical body, *vata* (composed of space and air) is the subtle energy associated with movement. It governs breathing, blinking, muscle and tissue movement, pulsation of the heart, and all movements in the cytoplasm and cell membranes. In balance, *vata* promotes creativity and flexibility. Out of balance, *vata* produces fear and anxiety. *Pitta* (composed of fire and water) expresses itself as the body's metabolic system. It governs digestion, absorption, assimilation, nutrition, metabolism, and body temperature. In balance, *pitta* promotes understanding and intelligence. Out of balance, *pitta* arouses anger, hatred, and jealousy. *Kapha* (composed of earth and water) is the energy that forms the body's structure (bones, muscles, tendons) and provides the "glue" that holds the cells together. *Kapha* supplies the water for all bodily parts and systems. It lubricates the joints, moisturizes the skin, and maintains immunity. In balance, *kapha* is expressed as love, calmness, and forgiveness. Out of balance, it leads to attachment, greed, and envy.

The internal environment is governed by *vata-pitta-kapha*, which is constantly reacting to the internal environment. The wrong diet, habits, lifestyle, incompatible food combinations, seasonal changes, suppressed emotions, and stress factors can all act together or separately to change the balance of *vata-pitta-kapha*. According to the nature of the cause, *vata*, *pitta*, or *kapha* is aggravated or disrupted, which affects the *agni* (gastric fire) and produces toxins. These toxins enter the bloodstream and are circulated throughout the body, clogging the channels. This accumulated toxicity will slowly affect vital life energy, immune function, and cell metabolic energy, resulting in disease. This can be nature's attempts to eliminate the toxicity from the body.

According to Ayurveda, the key to prevention of disease is to help the body eliminate toxins. This can be accomplished through dietary changes, lifestyle modifications, exercise, and a cleansing program. Cleansing measures include therapeutic vomiting, purging through use of laxatives, enemas, elimination of toxins through the nose, and detoxification of the blood.

Ayurveda takes a different approach to a balanced diet than the traditional view involving the five basic groups (meat, dairy, fruit, grains, and vegetables). According to Ayurveda, every food has its own taste, a heating or cooling energy, and a post-digestive effect. When two or three different food substances of different taste, energy, and post-digestive effect are combined together, the digestive system can become overloaded, which inhibits the ability of enzymes to do their work, thus producing toxins. When foods having different attributes, tastes, heating or cooling properties, and post-digestive effects are eaten together, "gastric fire" will be slowed down. When eaten separately, these same foods will stimulate gastric fire, will be digested more quickly, and will help to burn toxins. Therefore, according to Ayurveda, one should eat according to one's constitution and ingest fruits, starches, proteins, and fats separately, at different times of the day. Combining foods improperly can produce indigestion, fermentation, putrefaction, and gas formation. This condition, if prolonged, can lead to illness.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is generally defined as the process of providing visual or auditory evidence of the status of an autonomic bodily function (such as heart rate). Biofeedback training means using this information to learn how to self-regulate these biological processes. The term originated in the 1960s to describe procedures in which individuals learned to alter or control blood pressure, pulse rate, muscle tension, and other bodily functions that can be monitored physically or electronically. Individuals are trained to improve their health by using signals from their own bodies. Biofeedback of autonomic processes presents information to the cerebral cortex (the main area of consciousness). This information is usually fed back almost entirely to subcortical brain centers. For instance, blood flow in the various parts of the body and in various organs is continually and

sensitively monitored by an internal feedback system that sends signals to an unconscious subcortical control center, the hypothalamus, and the cortex is not made aware until large temperature changes occur. With biofeedback training, an individual can monitor slight changes in temperature and learn to increase or decrease the temperature at will.

Individuals differ in the way they respond to stress. Some individuals may experience a change in the activity of one function, such as blood pressure, while others maintain a normal level of activity. It is thought that these individual physical responses to stress can become habitual. When the body is repeatedly aroused, one or more functions may become permanently overactive. Damage to bodily tissues may eventually result. Biofeedback is often aimed at changing habitual reactions to stress that can cause pain or disease. Feedback of physical responses such as skin temperature and muscle tension provides information to help patients recognize a relaxed state. The most common forms of biofeedback utilize instruments that "feed back" information about such bodily processes as muscle tension, skin temperature, brainwaves, and respiration. By watching the monitoring device, patients can adjust their thinking and other mental processes in order to control bodily functions. Most practitioners rely on other techniques in addition to biofeedback. Patients may also be taught specific methods, such as relaxation or imagery, which is thought to have an effect on bodily functions. Patients may learn to identify the circumstances that trigger their symptoms and to avoid or cope with stressful events.

One area of biofeedback research is the use of alpha-theta brainwave training. This therapy has proven effective in the treatment of chemical dependency, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, multiple personality disorder, panic disorders, and eating disorders. In this type of biofeedback, patients are trained to increase the lower-frequency alpha and theta brainwaves while controlling the higher frequency beta waves. Another area of biofeedback research is a form of EEG training that uses light stimulation to increase the range and variability of patients' dominant brain frequencies. This treatment is being tested in trauma victims whose brains have gotten "stuck" in a pattern of predominantly slow brainwaves. EEG slowing is associated with symptoms such as anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue, hyperactivity, distractibility, mood swings, confusion, and disorganization.

Biofeedback is used to treat a variety of conditions, including headaches, pain, high blood pressure, low blood pressure, cardiac arrhythmias, Raynaud's disease, epilepsy, paralysis and other movement disorders, incontinence, drug and alcohol abuse, and attention deficit disorder.

Specialists who provide biofeedback training range from psychiatrists and psychologists to dentists, internists, nurses, and physical therapists.

It is not clear exactly how biofeedback works. Most patients who benefit from biofeedback are trained to relax and modify their behavior. Most scientists believe that relaxation is a key component in biofeedback treatment.

Chinese Traditional Medicine

Chinese medicine is a complete medical system that has diagnosed, treated, and prevented illness for more than 23 centuries. While it can remedy ailments and alter states of mind, Chinese medicine is also said to enhance recuperative power, immunity, and the capacity for pleasure, work, and creativity.

According to Chinese medicine, each organ has an element of "yin" and "yang" within it. The theory of yin and yang holds that all things have two polar aspects which are opposite but interdependent. Harmony of this union means health, good weather, and good fortune, while disharmony leads to disease, disaster, and bad luck. The strategy of Chinese medicine: to restore harmony. Yin represents the histological structures and nutrients and yang the functional activities. Some organs are predominantly yang in their functions while others are predominantly yin. Even though an organ may be predominantly yin (or yang) in nature, the balance of yin and yang is maintained in the healthy body because the sum total of the yin and yang will be in a fluctuating balance. If a condition of prolonged excess or deficiency of either yin or yang occurs, then disease results.

Chinese medicine theorizes that the human body is comprised of *qi*, moisture, and blood. *Qi* is the animating force that gives us our capacity to move, think, feel, and work. Moisture is the liquid medium that protects, nurtures, and lubricates tissue. Blood is the material foundation out of which bones, nerves, skin, muscles, and organs are created. Beyond those three elements are spirit, or *shen* -- the immaterial expression of the individual -- and essence, or *jing*, which represents the body's reproductive, growth, and regenerative substance.

The body is divided into five functional systems known as organ networks. These networks govern particular tissues, mental faculties, and physical activities by regulating and preserving *qi*, moisture, blood, spirit, and essence. For example, the kidney network is thought to be responsible for more than just managing fluid metabolism. The kidney is believed to store the essence, which controls the teeth, bones, marrow, brain, inner ear, pupil of the eye, and lumbar region, and is associated with the emotion of fear, the will, and the capacity for sharp thinking and perception. Therefore, problems such as retarded growth, ringing in the ears, infertility, low back pain, paranoia, fuzzy thinking, weak vision, apathy, or despair are viewed as dysfunctions of the kidney networks.

The heart not only propels blood through the vessels, but harbors the spirit and governs the mind. Symptoms as varied as anxiety, restless sleep, angina, and palpitations occur when the heart is agitated.

The spleen is responsible for the assimilation of food and fluids, as well as ideas, so when this network is disturbed, indigestion, bloating, fatigue, scattered thinking, and poor concentration ensue.

The liver is responsible for the storage of blood, flow of *qi*, and evenness of temperament. When the liver is disturbed, tension in the neck and shoulders, high blood pressure, headaches, cramping, moodiness, and impulsiveness may occur.

Through breathing, the lung sets the body rhythm, defends its boundaries, and affords inspiration. A troubled lung might trigger tightness in the chest, skin rashes, vulnerability to colds or flu, rigid thinking, or melancholy.

Just as external forces of nature such as wind, dampness, dryness, heat, and cold affect our weather, these same forces can upset the balance within the human body. This weakens or obstructs the movement of *qi* in the organs. Wind manifests itself as vertigo, unsteady movement, and trembling. Dampness causes phlegm and edema to develop. Dryness causes chapping or cracking of mucus membranes. Cold retards circulation and depresses metabolism, and heat causes inflammation.

Qi, moisture, and blood circulate within a web of pathways called "channels" that link together all parts of the body. Health exists when adequate *qi*, moisture, and blood flow smoothly. Symptoms as varied as joint pain, headache, anxiety, fatigue, menstrual cramps, high blood pressure, asthma, indigestion, and the common cold occur when circulation of these elements is disrupted. Illness is believed to be a consequence of either a depletion or a congestion of *qi*, moisture, and blood. Depletion leads to weakness, lethargy, frequent illness, indigestion, and inadequate blood flow. Congestion results in aches, tension, tenderness, pain, distended abdomen, irritability, and swelling.

The central principle of traditional Chinese medicine is to diagnose the cause of the disease, or yin-yang imbalance within the body, and to correct the flow of *qi* in the channels to correct the disease. To diagnose the cause of a disease, the practitioner will feel the pulses in both wrists and observe the color and form of the face, tongue, and body. This information is interpreted in the context of the patient's present and past complaints, work and living habits, physical environment, family history, and emotional status.

Diseases are believed to be either "exterior" or "interior." When cold invades the body, it may either be superficial or exterior in its damaging effect, such as the common cold, or it may be deep or interior, such as septicemia. Usually, exterior diseases are characterized by mild fever, headache, and generalized aches and pains. Interior diseases are characterized by high fever, thirst, restlessness, delirium, vomiting, diarrhea, and a purplish-red tongue with a white coating.

Diseases may also be "hot" or "cold." Diseases of heat show signs of an acute infection or intestinal obstruction, whereas diseases of cold are more chronic in nature. Diseases of heat show dislike of heat, fever, thirst, a red face, constipation, red scanty urine, and a red tongue with a yellow coating. Diseases of cold are characterized by a dislike of cold, pallor, loose stools, polyuria, a large flabby white tongue with a white coating, and a slow or deep and thready pulse.

Diseases may also be *xu* or *shi*. Diseases of *xu* are usually more chronic in nature and are due to a deficiency of either the yin or yang in the body. The patient is in low spirits, pale, emaciated, has palpitations, and the tongue is light or red with a white or yellow coating. A *shi* disease is often more acute and is due to an excess of the yin or yang in the body. The patient presents with irritability, distention and fullness of the chest and abdomen, scanty urine and dysuria, and a red or white tongue with a yellow or white coating.

Diseases involve either the channels and collaterals (called the *zang* and *fu* organs). Diseases of the channels and collaterals involve the superficial channels of the body. Arthritis and acute strains are examples. The internal yin and yang balance is

normal, but the flow of *qi* and blood through the channels is disrupted. These diseases usually present with pain and are called diseases of "bi" or blockage of the channels. If the flow of *qi* and blood is restored, then the pain will disappear. Diseases of the zang and *fu* organs involve the internal organs. Functions of the organs are disrupted because of an imbalance of the yin and yang within the body. Certain diseases may involve both the channels and collaterals as well as the internal organs.

The goal of treatment in Chinese medicine is to adjust and harmonize yin and yang. This is achieved by regulating the *qi*, moisture, and blood in the organ networks. Weak organs are strengthened, congested channels are opened, excess is dispersed, tightness is softened, agitation is calmed, heat is cooled, cold is warmed, dryness is moistened, and dampness is drained. Treatment may incorporate acupuncture, herbal remedies, diet, exercise, and massage. Duration of treatment depends on the nature of the complaint, its severity, and how long it has been present. As symptoms improve, fewer visits are required.

This article is first in a two-part series. See "Coding Notes" in May for a look at more alternative therapies and codes for these non-traditional treatments.

Notes

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