

EAST-WEST WELL-BEING

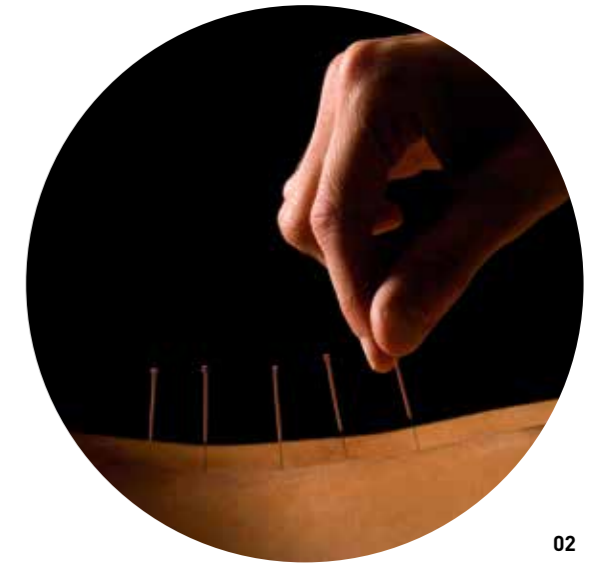
More than just alleviating symptoms, Eastern methods of healing, such as acupuncture or herbal therapy, seek to provide an underlying cure. Taking that further, today's practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine are integrating nutrition to foster physical and mental health.

STORY APPLE MANDY

COURTESY ORIENTAL HEALTH

01 Some traditional tools of TCM.

02 Acupuncture is regarded as essentially painless.



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Even in a fast-paced city like Hong Kong where the levels of stress encountered each day can be phenomenal, we are too often inclined to take our health for granted.

For Marius Arts, a self-employed marine surveyor and yacht delivery skipper, stress had taken a toll, interfering with his productivity and affecting his emotional health. He always felt tired, coupled with irritable moods and mild depression.

Instead of Western medicine, he opted for a holistic approach. Acupuncture was recommended, and within nine weeks of treatments supplemented with herbal medicine, his energy levels went up. His mood eventually improved and his depression slowly went away. To achieve optimal results, he carried on drinking herbal Chinese tea three times a week to reduce the 'wetness' from his organs. Since then, Arts has been an advocate of traditional Chinese medicine, or simply TCM.

With over 4,000 years of recorded history, TCM encompasses a range of practices including moxibustion, cupping, *qigong* (an integration of physical postures and breathing techniques), *tui na* or massage, and herbal remedies. These treatments are aimed at restoring and unblocking *qi*, the vital energy that flows within our body along the pathways known as meridians. The balance of yin and yang – the concept of two opposing but complementary forces – also affects *qi*. The literal translation of *qi* is 'breath', 'air' or 'gas'.



“TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE ... PROVIDES A SOLUTION TO SOME OF THE ISSUES [FOR WHICH] WESTERN MEDICINE DOESN'T HAVE THE ANSWERS”

- Judy Xu, Oriental Health

“Traditional Chinese medicine is effective because one can see the results,” says Judy Xu, director of Oriental Health, a Chinese medicine clinic in Sheung Wan that specialises in cancer care, cancer prevention, and pain management. “It’s a natural healing and it doesn’t have any side effects. It also provides a solution to some of the issues [for which] Western medicine doesn’t have the answers.”

Before any treatment is advised, the tongue and pulses are diagnosed to help determine the state of the patient’s internal organs. The tongue is said to reveal the condition of the stomach, spleen, liver, intestines, bladder, uterus, lungs and heart, while the left pulse is used to assess the heart, liver and kidney, and the right the lung, spleen and kidney. Based on problems detected in these areas, the doctor puts needles on the appropriate meridian.

JUST A SLIGHT PINCH

Needles may sound daunting but acupuncture is regarded as essentially painless. A popular Eastern practice, it has been used to help alleviate common symptoms including degenerative back and shoulder muscles, insomnia, stress, anxiety, depression, digestive complaints and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Shorter treatment periods are given to those who have a chronic cough or sinusitis, as well as those who are jet-lagged.

“A lot of past research showed that acupuncture beats conventional Western medicine for a number of health issues,” says Xu. “According to Western research, acupuncture produces good hormones that make us happy, peaceful and facilitate healing, and it also reduces bad hormones such as cortisones.”

According to TCM, each of the 12 main meridians is linked to an organ, and if a meridian is blocked it means the organ does not function well. There are also hundreds of acupuncture points and each point

may add, unblock or release *qi*. That’s why each treatment is individualised to ensure the root cause is treated holistically.

“The old saying ‘no pain no gain’ is not necessary,” says Clair Beardson, a licensed acupuncturist, Chinese medicine practitioner and nutritionist at Albert Place Practice in Central. “We tend to use distal acupuncture points, which are far removed from where the pain is, to eradicate the root causes of the disease.”

Moxibustion, a form of heat therapy, is another effective treatment. Traditionally, a dried plant called ‘moxa’ is burned near the skin surface, permitting heat into the body. There are different ways of doing it, and at Oriental Health the doctors burn dried mugwort placed on top of sliced ginger, allowing heat to enter through the ginger and into the acupuncture point. Combining acupuncture and moxibustion is another way, where hand-rolled herbs are burned on top of a needle.

“Like acupuncture, moxibustion can cure diseases,” says Xu. “Cancer patients with a low immune system usually have a low white blood cell count. We suggest doing moxibustion for six days in a row so the white blood cell count can go up. If the cell count is low, patients won’t be able to do chemotherapy. Moxibustion can boost the immune system, and it’s also good for chronic pain.”



COURTESY ORIENTAL HEALTH

PHOTOGRAPHY FRANKIE TSANG

03 Judy Xu, Oriental Health

04-05 Clair Beardson checks a pulse and treats a patient with moxibustion

06 Clair Beardson, Albert Place Practice



“TCM DOESN'T COST A MILLION DOLLARS TO ACHIEVE A MILLION-DOLLAR LOOK”

- Clair Beardson, Albert Place Practice

AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

Five-star hotels and resorts have been incorporating holistic TCM treatments to their menu of services, providing further options for guests. Here are some local and overseas options:



CHUAN SPA, LANGHAM PLACE, MONGKOK

This urban retreat is offering moxibustion, cupping or *ho guan* (pictured), and *gua sha* – an ancient Chinese practice that literally means “to scrape away fever”. A full moxibustion treatment lasts for an hour, including a 30-minute massage.



FOUR SEASONS RESORTS, BALI

TCM practitioner Nichole Dreyer (pictured) will be on-site for 60-minute acupuncture treatments at Four Seasons in Jimbaran Bay on December 18-24, and at Four Seasons in Sayan on January 3-9. Dreyer offers individualised treatments, using modern science with acupuncture techniques, followed by coaching.

07 Chinese medicinal herbs

08 Gianna Buonocore, Matilda Medical Centre

09 Raymond Chung, Albert Place Practice

BITTER MEDICINE

Herbal therapy is also another ancient Chinese treatment. It is sometimes supplemented with acupuncture, for optimal well-being. Marlene Katz, managing director of MKD Jewellery Design, first took Chinese herbs at age 30 to ease her premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and fight anxiety.

“I had been struggling and asking Western doctors for help in the last three years and they had nothing to offer me other than drugs, which have potentially dangerous side effects,” says Katz. “With TCM, I am now far less anxious and feel better.”

Several doctors offer Chinese herbs at their clinics. Oriental Health provides over 500 types in raw and powdered form – 95 per cent of them from plants and 5 per cent from animals. At least 15 types are provided for every prescription. Meanwhile, Integrated Medicine Institute offers concentrated Chinese medicine granules extracted from herbs.

But to promote its spread and greater acceptance outside Asia, the safety of Chinese medicine is important. Gianna Buonocore, a registered Chinese medicine practitioner of acupuncture at Matilda Medical Centre, says that most problems are usually due to poor quality rather than a problem with the herbs. “Since the Hong Kong handover, the government has regulated Chinese medicine and set up the Chinese Medicine Ordinance,” she says. “In particular, there are systems in place to check for microbial, heavy metal and pesticide contents.

“Any medical professional is bound by ethics, and the welfare of our patients is of paramount importance. This means Chinese medicine practitioners are bound to engage their highest professional standards so Chinese medicine can continue to be safe and effective.”



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COURTESY: MATILDA MEDICAL CENTRE

PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCKPHOTO (RIGHT) / FRANKETSANG (TOP RIGHT)

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

When it comes to the importance of good nutrition, TCM doctors are making an effort to integrate the wisdom of Chinese and Western medicine. From the Chinese medicine perspective, correct food helps prevent degenerative diseases and slow the aging process.

“Cancer and diabetes are the main problematic diseases,” says Beardson. “These diseases come from within and not from the outside, so one needs to take responsibility for his inner self.”

Indeed, health starts within. Businessmen who take caffeine and alcohol are encouraged to include cinnamon in their diet. This herb helps warm the kidneys, especially for those who like eating raw food. Wolfberries are good for the eyes and liver, while shan ji sheng, or mulberry twigs, can stimulate bone-forming cells and suppress bone-breaking cells, says Raymond Chung, nutritionist at Albert Place Practice.

Nutritional advice for detoxification is also offered at Albert Place Practice. Muesli is not recommended for those with a ‘cold body pattern’, which translates to having low blood pressure, suppressed adrenal function and a weak spleen. The point is that the nuts in muesli need breaking down and could put a strain on a weak spleen.

Chung also suggests that eating cooked vegetables is better unless one has a strong spleen. Tomatoes and carrots – rich in lycopene and beta-carotene, respectively – are actually more nutritious when cooked. So are onions, as the active ingredient quercetin remains even when cooked.

“Most people think raw food is good,” says Chung. “In reality, the cell wall – a membrane covering plant cells – is ruptured by high temperature so the internal nutrients can be released into the surrounding medium. This explains why some cooked vegetables

are more nutritious than raw ones.”

These days, people want to detox, de-stress, look better, look younger, have more energy, feel better and feel alive. “TCM doesn’t cost a million dollars to achieve a million-dollar look,” says Beardson. “Chinese traditional medicine is less invasive. It works on a preventive basis: increasing energy and improving immune systems.” Vibrant health, after all, comes from within. ☺



ROOTS OF HEALING

According to TCM experts, these are five of the most expensive sources of plant-based treatments and their claimed health benefits. Rare but readily available in Hong Kong, they are priced based on size or volume and whether they are farmed or harvested from the wild.



CISTANCHE 肉苁蓉
Tunes the kidney’s yang energy, enhances immunity, fights aging and boosts libido.



CORDYCEPS 冬蟲夏草
Enhances the immune system, boosts energy and eases fatigue.



GINSENG 人參
Invigorates qi, boosts energy, strengthens the mind and nourishes the spleen and lungs. Meanwhile, the so-called **pseudoginseng** 三七 boosts blood supply and circulation, and eases pain.



REISHI MUSHROOM 靈芝
Nourishes the heart, calms the spirit, enriches qi or vital energy, and pumps up blood supply.