Traditional Chinese medicine and HIV

Stabilizing *yin* and *yang*

The goal of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is to balance the *yin* (vital function) and the *yang* (vital essence). One analogy describes *yang* as the gear and *yin* as the grease that allows the gear to run smoothly. An excess of *yang* leads to the consumption of *yin* and the formation of heat, much as a gear that works too hard burns away the grease and builds up heat. The balancing of *yin* and *yang* stabilizes a person’s energy, otherwise known as *Chi*, or *Qi* (pronounced chee). The purpose of TCM is *fu-zheng*, which means to support the true or righteous *Chi* to inhibit diseased *Chi* from progressing.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is a component of TCM widely used by people with HIV. Read more about acupuncture and HIV.

Nutrition and herbal treatments

TCM includes extensive nutritional counselling. A proper diet supports health and vitality, thus promoting the proper or righteous *Chi*. Herbal treatments may be used to strengthen the righteous *Chi* in particular parts of the body, contributing to the balance of the whole.

TCM uses many herbal remedies, a number of which are sold in health food stores. This type of availability brings herbal remedies within reach of many people who don’t have access to a TCM practitioner or who don’t wish to visit one. Unfortunately, however, the quality of remedies sold varies widely. A TCM practitioner or Chinese herbalist should be able to recommend the safest and most effective products. If you so choose, a TCM practitioner can tailor a combination of TCM treatments that may be more specific to your treatment needs than an over-the-counter single-herb preparation.

HIV as a disease of “hidden heat”

TCM recognizes that the body and its *Chi* are vulnerable to damage from both internal and external sources, particularly from wind, heat, cold, dampness and dryness. Many experienced practitioners consider HIV a disease of “hidden heat.” As HIV progresses, heat is produced through the consumption of *yin* in the body. Typical examples of the wasting of *yin* include symptoms such as night sweats and diarrhea. While the *yin* is consumed, a more vigorous form of heat or fire forms in the body. This creates a bodily environment that can support a variety of HIV-related infections. Thus, one of the prime TCM treatment strategies for HIV is to counteract the environment of heat.

Regulation and education of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners in Canada

The Canadian Society of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture recommends that people with complicated illnesses such as HIV visit a fully qualified doctor of traditional Chinese medicine (TCMD) if they wish to use TCM.

Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners are regulated in Ontario and British Columbia.

Qualifications of TCM practitioners can vary. To be qualified as a doctor of TCM, a practitioner must have graduated from a university program in TCM or have completed a four-year program specializing in TCM after having completed an undergraduate degree. A significant amount of clinical experience is also required. It is best to seek a practitioner with extensive clinical experience relating to HIV.
Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV- and hepatitis C-related illness and the treatments in question.

CATIE provides information resources to help people living with HIV and/or hepatitis C who wish to manage their own health care in partnership with their care providers. Information accessed through or published or provided by CATIE, however, is not to be considered medical advice. We do not recommend or advocate particular treatments and we urge users to consult as broad a range of sources as possible. We strongly urge users to consult with a qualified medical practitioner prior to undertaking any decision, use or action of a medical nature.

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Information on safer drug use is presented as a public health service to help people make healthier choices to reduce the spread of HIV, viral hepatitis and other infections. It is not intended to encourage or promote the use or possession of illegal drugs.

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