Traditional Chinese Medicine

Chinese healers began the development of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) more than 3,000 years ago. As a comprehensive health system, it has a range of applications from preventive health care and maintenance to diagnosis and treatment of acute and chronic disorders. Its treatments and diagnostic methods focus on balancing internal and external energies through diet, herbal treatments, acupuncture, and breathing techniques. Chinese healing practices have also spread, with variations, throughout other Asian countries, particularly Japan, Korea, Tibet, and Vietnam. In a few millennium of practice, TCM practitioners have evolved a system both subtle and dramatically effective, and one that, in China, is given as much if not more respect than Western medicine.
What Is Traditional Chinese Medicine?

Shen Nong the Fire Emperor, said to have lived from 2698 to 2598 BC, is considered the founder of herbal medicine in China. The written history of Traditional Chinese Medicine is more than 2,500 years old, starting with the text on internal medicine from Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor. Written long before the birth of Hippocrates, the father of Western medicine, the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic) covers such principles as yin and yang, the five phases, the effects of the season, and treatments such as acupuncture and moxibustion (the burning of mugwort over inflamed and affected areas of the body).

TCM is associated with early Taoists and Buddhists who observed energy within themselves, in plants and animals, and throughout the cosmos. Based on a belief in the natural order of the universe and the direct correlation between the human body and the cosmos, this philosophy stresses the constant search for harmony and balance in an environment of constant change. By the close of the Han era (220 AD), the Chinese had a clear grasp of the nature of disease, preventive medicine, first aid, and dietetics, and had devised breathing practices to promote longevity.

During the fourth and fifth centuries AD, China’s influence spread throughout Asia, and both Taoism and Buddhism had a marked impact on ideas about health. Sun Si Mian (581–682 AD), a famous physician, established himself as China’s first medical ethicist. He advocated the need for rigorous scholarship, compassion toward patients, and high moral standards in physicians. In the eleventh century, TCM began to focus more on social phenomena, especially human relations and ethical behavior. Initially this orientation resulted in increased scientific medical study and publications.

As TCM developed further, however, people began to take for granted that a breakthrough in one realm of knowledge would eventually solve all problems of human existence. (As in the West, some assume that advances in technology will solve all problems.) Eventually, sociological methods were applied to medical problems, and clinical and empirical research reached a low point. Fortunately, the core of the scientific system was never obliterated, and this century has seen a worldwide revival of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

In China today, TCM is practiced in hospitals alongside Western medicine. Physicians not only study principles of anatomy, histology, biochemistry, bacteriology, and surgery but also acupuncture, acupressure, and herbal medicine. Patients can choose TCM or Western approaches alone or in combination to treat their particular problem.

TCM’s development over thousands of years has yielded multiple philosophies, convergent concepts, and varied practices and treatments. It’s impossible to separate the individual concepts and specific treatment approaches from the philosophy of the
entire system. Prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of diseases are based on the concepts of chi, yin and yang, the five phases, the five seasons, and the three treasures. Often only isolated fragments of TCM emerge in the West, which may prevent more complete understanding and acceptance there.

**Chi: The Energy in You and Me**

The concept most central to TCM is chi (pronounced chee, and also spelled qi), which is translated as energy. Chi represents an invisible flow of energy that circulates through plants, animals, and people as well as the earth and sky. It is what maintains physiologic functions and the health and well-being of the individual. In TCM theory, energy is distributed throughout the body along a network of energy circuits or meridians, connecting all parts of the body. Obstructed chi flow in the human body can cause problems ranging from social difficulties to illness. Its effects are very individual—a person gets sick, has problems at work, or fights with family—and depend on each individual's unique chi. Certain TCM treatments such as meditation, exercise, and acupuncture are ways of enhancing or correcting the flow of chi.

**Yin and Yang: Two Parts of the Whole**

In the Taoist philosophy, wholeness is composed of the union of opposites—dark and light, soft and hard, female and male, slow and fast, and so forth. These opposite but complementary aspects are called yin and yang. Originally the terms designated geographical aspects such as the shady and sunny side of a mountain or the southern and northern bank of a river. In modern terms, they are used to characterize the polar opposites that exist in everything and make up the physical world. The traditional representation of the union of yin and yang is shown in Figure 3.1

![Figure 3.1: Yin and yang, inseparable parts of the whole, each containing part of the other.](image-url)

From the health perspective, the basis of well-being is the appropriate balance of yin and yang as they interact in the body. The imbalance of yin and yang is considered to be the cause of illness.
Yin is the general category for passivity and is like water, with a tendency to be cold and heavy. Yin uses fluids to moisten and cool our bodies. It provides for restfulness, as the body slows down and sleeps. Yin is associated more with substance than with energy. Things that are close to the ground are yin or more earthy. Yin is associated with the symptoms of coldness, paleness, low blood pressure, and chronic conditions. People with excess yin tend to catch colds easily, and are sedentary and sleepy.

Yang is the general category for activity and aggressiveness. It is like fire with its heating and circulating characteristics. Associated with things higher up or more heavenly, yang is the energy that directs movement and supports its substance. Symptoms such as redness in the face, fever, high blood pressure, and acute conditions are associated with yang. People with excess yang tend to be nervous and agitated and cannot tolerate much heat.

It must be understood that yin and yang cannot exist independently of each other. Nothing is either all yin or all yang. They are complementary and depend on each other for their very existence—without night there can be no day, without moisture there can be no dryness, and without cold there can be no heat. It is the interaction of yin and yang that creates the changes that keep the world in motion; summer leads to winter, night becomes day. Yin and yang are used in both the diagnosis and treatment of illness. For example, if a person is experiencing too much stress, usually understood as an excess of yang, more yin activities, such as meditation and relaxation, are the appropriate treatment.

The Five Phases: An Internal Cycle in Balance

As they studied the world around them, the Chinese perceived connections between major forces in nature and particular internal organ systems. Seeing similarities between natural elements and the body, early practitioners developed a concept of health care that encompassed both natural elements and body organs. This theory is known as the Five Phases Theory (wu-hsing). Five elements—fire, earth, metal, water, and wood—represent movement or energies that succeed one another in a dynamic relationship and in a continuous cycle of birth, life, and death. These elements do not represent static objects, since even mountains and rivers change constantly with time. In the Five Phases Theory, it is not the substances themselves that are important, but rather how they work together to make up the essential life force or chi.

The rhythm of events resembles a circle known as the Creation Cycle. In this cycle, wood burns to feed fire; fire’s ashes produce earth; earth gives up its ore to create metal; metal causes condensation to bring forth water; and water nourishes and creates plants and trees, creating wood. Each element is related to a specific bodily system, as well as to a pair of internal organs—you guessed it, a yin organ and a yang
organ. The yin organ is solid and dense, like the liver, while its yang partner is hollow or forms a pocket, like the gallbladder. Remember, no one element is the beginning or end—they flow together in an endless loop. It is the proper interaction of the organ partners that influences how well the entire body functions. The elements and their related systems and organs are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1  Elements, Systems, and Organs of the Five Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>System</th>
<th>Yin Organ</th>
<th>Yang Organ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Toxin processing</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Gallbladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Circulation of blood, hormones, and food</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Small Intestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Digestion</td>
<td>Spleen &amp; Pancreas</td>
<td>Stomach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Respiration and Elimination</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Large Intestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Elimination</td>
<td>Kidneys</td>
<td>Bladder</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Five Seasons: Balanced on the Outside

Just as the internal world of systems and organs is linked to the Five Phases, so too is the external world, specifically, the seasons and points of the compass. “But wait a minute,” you say. “There are only four of each of those!” Remember, though, that the Chinese name for China means “The Middle Kingdom,” and the fifth direction, the center, becomes obvious. Just as the center of the compass has a distinct identity in TCM, so does the center of the year—the late summer, when the agricultural cycle is at its peak, and after which most living things begin to decline into their Winter states.

The Chinese compass differs from the Western compass in one other way: Chinese culture places so much importance on the direction south that it, rather than north, is placed at the top of maps and compass roses. Just as south rules the top of the compass, it also represents summer, the “high noon” of the year and is linked to fire. West, the direction of the setting sun, is associated with autumn and metal, which is used to make tools for harvesting. North is linked to winter and water, the opposite of the element of fire and is seen as a period of dormancy. East, the direction of the rising sun, is associated with spring and with wood, which represents all growing things. The fifth and central element, earth, is related to the late summer season and a time of maturity. These relationships are shown in Figure 3.2.
Traditional Chinese Medicine traces the causes of disease to imbalances in these sets of five—elements, organs, seasons, and directions. If one component is overbearing and excessive, the system is thrown out of balance, and another component becomes weak and debilitated. It is a complex system of checks and balances that is often not easily grasped by those with a Western perspective. Diagnosis and treatment of illness depends on understanding the five elements, seasons, and directions and how they interact.

**The Three Vital Treasures: Building Blocks of Life**

The Chinese believe that a combination of life force elements make up the substance and functions of the body, mind, and spirit, which are fundamentally all one and the same. One way to understand this connection is to think of water with its wet, fluid nature. Compare that to ice, which not only appears different but feels hard and cold, and steam with its hot, gaseous nature. Despite the differences in appearance, the molecules are the same, they are simply in three different states. In the same way, body, mind, and spirit can be seen as different expressions of the same individual.

The Taoists call body, mind, and spirit the three “vital treasures.” They are *jing*, meaning basic essence, *chi* meaning energy or life force, and *shen* meaning spirit and mind. The balance of their abundance or deficiency influences the state of health.
Jing is the essence with which people are born, similar to Western concepts of genes, DNA, and heredity. Essence is the gift of one’s parents; it is the basic material in each cell that allows that cell to function. It is the bodily reserves that support life and must be restored by food and rest. Chi, as described previously, is the sustaining energy of all life. The vital treasure known as shen is the gift of heaven and represents spiritual and mental aspects of life. Shen comprises one’s emotional well-being, thoughts, and beliefs. It is the radiance, or inner glow, that can be perceived by others. In order for people to be healthy, their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects must be balanced.

How Does Traditional Chinese Medicine Work?

The Chinese regard the body as a system that requires a balance of yin and yang energy to enjoy good health. Each part of the body is also thought of as an individual system that requires its own balance of yin and yang to function properly. TCM assumes that a balanced body has a natural ability to resist or cope with agents of disease. Symptoms are caused by an imbalance of yin and yang in some part of the body, and illness can develop if the imbalance persists for any length of time. Therefore, health is maintained by recognizing an imbalance before it becomes a disease. Chinese medicine holds that everything needed to restore health already exists in nature and that it is up to the individual, with or without the aid of a health practitioner, to free up energy and restore balance using diet, herbs, acupuncture, and other yin/yang treatments.

The Chinese believe that all living things—people, the earth, and the universe—are connected by cosmic energy. Thus the balance of chi in an individual is connected to the balance in the environment; the forces active within the world are the same forces active within the individual body. Simply put, nothing happens without consequence to something else. The concern for balance and harmony is not only reflected in the TCM approach to the individual but also in the view that the balance and well-being of the resources of the natural world and society are vital to the overall health of all who live on the earth. Practitioners never lose sight of the multifaceted relationship between individuals, communities, societies, and nature.

Traditional Chinese Diagnosis

The TCM practitioner has four diagnostic methods (szu-chen): inspection, auscultation/olfaction, inquiry, and palpation. These methods gather information about the five phases and their related body systems. The practitioner examines how the person eats, sleeps, thinks, works, relaxes, dreams, and imagines. No part of the self is considered a neutral bystander when the body is in a state of imbalance. All of this
diagnostic information is compiled to arrive at a “pattern of disharmony,” or bian zheng.

Inspection refers to the visual assessment of the spirit and physical body of patients. Spirit inspection or observation is an assessment of the person’s overall appearance, especially the eyes, the complexion, and the quality of voice. Good spirit, even in the presence of serious illness, indicates a more positive prognosis.

Tongue diagnosis is a highly developed system of inspection of the physical body. The tongue is considered to be the visual gateway to the interior of the body. The whole body “lives” on the tongue, rather like a hologram. Different areas of the tongue correspond to the five phases and related organ systems as seen in Figure 3.3.

The practitioner inspects the color, shape, markings, and coating of the tongue to gather information about the state of balance in the person’s body. For example, a moist tongue with a thin white coating may signal the presence of a “cold” or yin illness whereas a dry, yellow or dark tongue may signal a “hot” or yang illness.

The second part of diagnosis consists of listening and smelling. Practitioners will listen to the quality of speech, breath, and other sounds their patients make, and they will observe other odors such as those from the breath and body, as well as excreta.
Types of sound are associated with the five phases and organ systems. How the person is breathing is a good indication of the status of the organs. Phases and organ systems are associated with specific odors such as sickly sweet, rotten, putrid, rancid, and scorched. Odors can arise from the skin itself or from the ears, nose, genitals, urine, stool, or bodily discharges. The breath may also have a distinctive odor. Usually the stronger the odor, the more serious the imbalance has become.

The third part of diagnosis, inquiry, is the process of taking a comprehensive health, social, emotional, and spiritual history. The practitioners question their patients not only about the complaint that brought them there, but also about many other factors, including sensations of hot and cold, perspiration, excreta, hearing, thirst, sleep, digestion, emotions, sexual drive, and energy level.

Palpation is the fourth diagnostic method and includes pulse examination and general touching and probing of the body, especially at the acupuncture points. Reading the pulses can provide key information about the person’s condition. For example, a fast pulse might indicate a problem with an overactive heart or liver; a slow pulse might indicate a sluggish digestive system; pulses described as wide, flat, and soft may indicate a spleen problem; and narrow, forceful pulses might indicate a liver dysfunction. The locations of major points used in pulse diagnosis are illustrated in Figure 3.4. The pulse allows the practitioner to feel the quality of chi and blood at the different locations in the body.
Traditional Chinese Treatments: Restoring Balance and Flow.

Since an individual's combinations of yin and yang are unique, TCM practitioners must tailor their treatment to each client. The goal of treatment is to reestablish a balanced flow of energy in the person through diet, herbs, massage, acupuncture, and Qigong, a Chinese form of Yoga.

Diet

The simplest and most accessible treatment is diet. Dietary interventions are individualized on the basis of the individual's pattern of disharmony. Foods are used to rebalance the body's internal “climate” by bringing warmth to coldness or cooling off too much heat—that is, by balancing yin and yang. The thermal nature of food is described by the way a person feels after ingesting it. A diet to maintain health should be varied and include a minimum of seven different fruits and vegetables a day to avoid a cold or hot imbalance. If a person is ill and the symptoms indicate a hot condition, then the diet should emphasize cooling foods, and vice versa.

Each food has both yin and yang energies but often one is dominant. Cooling foods and those with bitter and salty flavors are yin. Warming foods are yang, as are foods with pungent and sweet flavors. When people have an excess of yin they may be sluggish, laid back, calm, slightly overweight, and emotionally sensitive. To balance these overly yin tendencies, yang foods are added to the diet to help activate the metabolism and provide more energy. People experiencing an excess of yang may be tense, loud, hyperactive, and aggressive. By adding yin foods to their diets, internal tension can be cooled. See Table 3.2 for a list of common foods and their thermal effects on the body.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2 Thermal Properties of Some Common Foods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warming</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TCM practitioners recommend certain foods for balancing and improving a variety of conditions. Foods can be potent healers, especially when dealing with temporary illnesses, but they are never used as a lone treatment for serious or chronic conditions.
Herbs
Herbal medicine (ahong yao) is an integral part of TCM. In terms of the complexity of diagnosis and treatment, it resembles the practice of Western internal medicine. Herbs may be used whole, typically as a tea, or they may be powdered and made into pills, poultices, or tinctures for internal or external use. Just as in food, some herbs are warming (cinnamon) and some are cooling (mint).

With the exception of conditions that require surgery, herbs can be used to treat almost any condition in the practice of TCM. Herbs are often prescribed in complex mixtures and tend not to be used as isolated components, such as extractions from the parent plant. TCM practitioners believe that the healing benefits of herbs result from the synergistic interactions of all the components of the plant. The same herb can be used for many different disorders. Likewise, the same disorder in different people will be treated with different herbs, depending on the practitioner’s assessment of the individual. Herbs are used in the following ways: antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal, and anticancer. Herbs are also used to treat pain, aid digestion, lower cholesterol, treat colds and flu, increase resistance to disease, enhance immune function, improve circulation, regulate menstruation, and increase energy. Table 3.3 lists herbs commonly used as tonics in TCM, and Chapter 6, “Herbal Medicine,” covers the use of herbs in greater detail.

Table 3.3  Tonic Herbs Frequently Used in TCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herb</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Lowers blood pressure, lowers cholesterol and triglycerides, antiseptic, antifungal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginger</td>
<td>Warming effect, stimulates digestion, decreases nausea, relieves aches and pains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green tea</td>
<td>Lowers cholesterol, anticancer effects, antibacterial effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astragalus</td>
<td>Enhances immune function by increasing activity of white blood cells and increases production of antibodies and interferon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberian Ginseng</td>
<td>Enhances immune function, increases energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginseng</td>
<td>Increases appetite and digestion, tones skin and muscles, restores depleted sexual energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong Quai (or Tang Kuei)</td>
<td>Blood-building tonic which improves circulation, tones the uterus, balances female hormones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Shou Wu (or Fo Ti)</td>
<td>Cleans the blood, nourishes hair and teeth, increases energy, powerful sexual tonic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Massage
Traditional Chinese massage methods were described in texts as early as 200 BC. Both energizing and sedating massage techniques are used to treat and relieve many medical conditions.
Widely varying illnesses treated with traditional Chinese massage include the common cold, insomnia, leg cramps, painful menses, diarrhea, abdominal pains, headache, asthma, rheumatic pains, stiff neck, colic, nasal bleeding, and throat pains. Massage increases circulation of blood and lymph to the skin and underlying muscles, bringing added nutrients and pain relief. Massage can help restore proper movement to injured limbs and joints and help restore a sense of balance. Massage is an effective method of reducing stress and tension that usually leads to a feeling of relaxation. Chapter 11 covers massage therapy in greater detail.

Acupuncture
Acupuncture involves stimulating specific anatomic points called *hsueh* where each meridian passes close to the skin surface. The primary goal of acupuncture is the manipulation of energy flow throughout the body following a thorough assessment by a TCM practitioner. Puncturing the skin with very fine needles is the usual method but practitioners may also use pressure (*shiatsu*), friction, suction, heat, or electromagnetic energy to stimulate points. *Moxibustion* is an application of heat from certain burning substances at acupuncture points on the body. Ear acupuncture is a complete system within itself and is quite powerful for balancing the hormones and overall energy of the body.

Treatment is offered in the context of the total person and with the goal of correcting the flow of chi to restore health. Some Western health care practitioners who have learned the techniques of acupuncture miss the broader context and limit their focus to an injured or painful body part. Acupuncture is effective in the treatment of acute and chronic pain and motion disabilities. In addition it can be used for the maladies listed below:

- Respiratory and cardiovascular conditions
- Eye, ear, nose, and throat disorders
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Urogenital conditions
- Skin disorders
- Psychiatric problems
- Addictive disorders and withdrawal syndromes.

Chapter 12, “Pressure-Point Therapies,” covers acupuncture in more detail.
Qigong

Qigong, pronounced chee-gong, is the art and science of using breath, movement, self-massage, and meditation to cleanse, strengthen, and circulate vital life energy and blood. In India the comparable practice is called yoga. Both of these traditions of self-healing have been called “moving meditation” or “meditation in motion.” T’ai Chi, which is familiar to many Americans, is a more physical form of qigong. In China, millions of people from children to workers, to elders, to patients in the hospital practice qigong daily. The techniques are easy to learn and simple to apply for people who are well or sick. Qigong decreases fatigue and forgetfulness and generates energy by enhancing bodily functions.

It is inevitable that taking a deep breath triggers a sense of relaxation. By adding the intention to relax with breathing, the effect is even greater. Adding gentle movements or self-massage to deep breathing and relaxation generates increased self-healing abilities. The focus on deep and intentional relaxation allows for the release of emotional stress, for a sense of tranquility, and for one’s natural spirituality to arise.

How Can I Get Started With Traditional Chinese Medicine?

In the 19th century, when large numbers of Chinese laborers arrived in the United States, the immigrant community also included TCM physicians and herbal merchants. Ah Fong Chuck became the first licensed practitioner of TCM in the United States in 1901 when he was awarded a medical license in Idaho. With the advent of World War II and the interruption of the herb supply from China, these practices disappeared or retreated into Chinatowns nationwide. In the 1970s, President Nixon reopened communication with China and the practice of TCM began to gain visibility once again throughout the United States. Now, a clear interest in acupuncture, herbs, and qigong can be found among many North American people. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the NIH is sponsoring many research programs studying the applicability of TCM to common western ailments (see Table 3.4). Their Web site (nccam.nih.gov) is a great place to start an investigation of what kind of TCM might be right for you.
Table 3.4 Studies Funded by the Office of Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Condition</th>
<th>TCM Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unipolar depression</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osteoarthritis</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premenstrual syndrome</td>
<td>Traditional Chinese Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common warts</td>
<td>Chinese herbal therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance disorders</td>
<td>T’ai Chi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menopausal hot flashes</td>
<td>Chinese herbal therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postoperative oral surgery pain</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breech version</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic sinusitis in HIV infection</td>
<td>Traditional Chinese Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity</td>
<td>Acupuncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intractable reflex sympathetic Dystrophy</td>
<td>Qigong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diet

Diet is a primary area where TCM can provide us with some practical guidelines. North Americans seem to have diets of extremes, with fluctuation between overindulgence in food and starvation diets. It is often an all-or-none attitude that has neglected the principle of balance. Limiting the diet to a few fruits and vegetables may be as harmful as a steady diet of hamburgers. In TCM it is believed that illness can be avoided by eating a varied diet as much as possible. For example, avoiding a cold or hot imbalance is accomplished by eating a minimum of seven different fruits and vegetables each day.

For mild, temporary illnesses one might use a number of diet remedies. The cold type of the common cold and flu previously described as characterized by low-grade fever, no sweating, headache, muscle aches, stuffy nose, and a cough with clear white phlegm is treated with warming foods such as garlic, ginger, chives, pepper, pumpkin, apple, onion, and lamb. The hot type of the common cold and flu with its symptoms of high fever, sweating, headache, dry or sore throat, thirst, nasal congestion, and sticky or yellow mucus responds to cooling foods such as watermelon, eggplant, banana, plums, tomato, and tofu.

The cold type of low back pain characterized by coldness and severe pain in the lower back that gradually worsens over time, is not relieved by lying down, and is aggravated by rainy days is treated with hot foods including garlic, chicken, apple,
yam, celery, onion, peach, and mustard greens. The hot type of back pain that includes symptoms such as soreness of the lower back that is relieved by lying down, weakness of the legs, and frequent relapses is treated with cooling foods such as peanuts, sesame, soybeans, beef, pineapple, and grapes.

**Breathing and Relaxation**

Like many other forms of alternative therapies, TCM regards breath as an important function of life. Restrictions in breathing lead to dysfunction and disease. Forming healthy breathing habits can counter stress and help balance body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

Throughout the day one may find hundreds of opportunities to integrate some deep breathing, relaxation, self-massage, and gentle movement techniques into usual activities. For example, you could try any one of these techniques:

- You are sitting at a stoplight. Take a deep breath.
- You are just about to fall asleep or have just awakened. Breathe deeply and allow your whole body to become completely relaxed.
- You are in the shower washing your hair. As you apply shampoo, massage your scalp vigorously; rub your ears, relax, take several deep breaths.
- As you apply lotion or oil to your body following your bath, do so with the intent of relaxing each muscle group as you gently massage your entire body.
- You are watching television. During each commercial break, massage your hands, feet, and ears. Breathe deeply and relax.
- You are vacuuming the house. Relax your shoulders, breathe deeply, and coordinate your movements with your breathing.

**The Absolute Minimum**

- Traditional Chinese Medicine is primarily concerned with the detection and correction of imbalances within and around the body.
- TCM uses diet, breathing, acupuncture, and herbal treatments to correct imbalances.
- In China, TCM techniques are practiced alongside, and often integrated with, Western biomedical techniques.
RESOURCES

- Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine
  www.ccaom.org

- Academy of Chinese Culture and Health Science
  www.acchs.edu

- American Academy of Medical Acupuncture
  www.medicalacupuncture.org

- Cathay Herbal Laboratories
  www.cathayherbal.com