

Traditional Chinese Medicine: A Basic Understanding

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a system of healing from China. While TCM is regarded as an alternative medicine system in the West, in China and other Asian countries, it is practiced widely by the locals. Medical practitioners are trained in the diagnostic and healing techniques with centuries of tradition and philosophy. Like naturopathy, TCM is holistic. It considers all aspects of the person including physical, nutritional, emotional, mental and spiritual for diagnosis.

TCM is based on the balance of opposing elements (the yin and yang) in the body, as well as their harmony with the environment around it. The two main forces of yin and yang combine to form the "qi" (pronounced as "chee") or universal life force. When qi is in harmony, health is not only enhanced but also the capacity for fulfilment, happiness and well being. Disease and illness arise from imbalances of yin and yang that block the proper flow of qi. Therapies to treat disease are aimed at restoring the balance and unblocking the flow to restore health.

TCM is primarily non-invasive. TCM treatments include the use of Chinese herbs, acupuncture, meditation, Chinese massage therapy, mental and physical disciplines such as Tai Chi and Qigong and nutritional therapy. Practitioners will attempt to realign the body's balance using a combination of treatments before suggesting surgery by a Western Doctor.

Most research into the effectiveness of TCM has been conducted on acupuncture. Although it has been difficult to conclusively prove the benefits of acupuncture, the results of large-scale studies are sufficiently convincing enough for FDA to consider the tradition "promising" and worthy of further study.

In addition, it has been proven that many herbs used in Chinese medicine have therapeutic benefits. For instance, ginseng and Echinacea are both powerful herbs with strong medicinal actions. More recently, there has been some acknowledgement that Chinese massage therapies do help to manipulate muscles, nerves and tendons.

There are many criticisms of TCM as a form of healing. Most TCM methodologies have no research basis and remain largely unproven. Also, some of the TCM beliefs have been mixed with Eastern mythology. For instance, tiger penis is used as an energy supplement as tigers are considered energetic animals. Whether it really helps to boost energy levels remain unsubstantiated by proper research. Most of the Chinese herbs are also not regulated. This makes it more important to consult with a reputable and reliable TCM practitioner.

However, aside from the criticisms, there is much merit in the philosophy of TCM. healing. If more research can be done into TCM, then the mythology can be separated from the facts and perhaps, more people will embrace TCM more readily as a form of healing.

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About the Author

Evelyn Lim owns a health and wellness article directory site. Her site has a growing database of health articles on more than 100 topics such as alternative medicine, disease, cancer, natural remedy, health insurance and weight loss. Submit an article at <http://www.HealthandWellnessCentral.com> now!