

## Pacific College of Oriental Medicine – Articles

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### Creating Healthy Children with Chinese Medicine

Chinese medicine is one of the oldest, most commonly used medical systems in the world, originating in China more than 3,000 years ago. Although it has been offered in the United States for more than 150 years, most Americans were exposed to it in 1972 when New York Times columnist James Reston used acupuncture during a trip to China to provide pain relief from an emergency appendectomy. Chinese medicine is a major healthcare system for over one-quarter of the world's population and the benefit of acupuncture cannot be denied. It is an effective, low cost modality that works in harmony with the body's natural healing ability. Treatment focuses on the well being of the entire person, not simply on the physical complaints and symptoms.

According to the theories of Chinese medicine , all of the disorders or diseases from which people suffer can be related to an imbalance in one's Qi , or vital energy. Qi regulates a person's spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical balance. When Qi flow is disrupted through poor health habits or other circumstances, pain and/or disease can result. Chinese medicine 's aim, then, is to keep the normal flow of this energy unblocked.

Chinese medicine is gentle and free of the side effects of many drugs used for the same conditions. As a form of primary healthcare, it addresses a broad range of conditions that Western medicine finds difficult to treat such as stress, depression, addiction, chronic pain, allergies, migraines and low back pain. In addition to treating primary health complaints, the benefits of Chinese medicine also include pain relief, immune enhancement and increased energy and well being.

In the last 30 years, the many side effects and shortcomings of modern Western medicine have gained more attention. In particular, the overuse of antibiotics in children has led to serious health problems, including the epidemic of pediatric ear infections, antibiotics' suspected role in the development of allergies, and the development of new strains of infectious bacteria which are resistant to antibiotic treatment. From the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) point of view, the incorrect use of antibiotics can lead to damage of the Spleen\* and result in susceptibility to disease such as earaches, tonsillitis, and various allergies. Through the use of Chinese Medicine in the care of children , many of the downfalls to Western medicine may be avoided.

Pediatric s is one of the oldest specialties within Chinese medicine . Instead of viewing children as miniature adults, TCM pediatric s believes that children are immature both physically and functionally. It is due to this immaturity that most of the common pediatric complaints arise. 1 Because children 's

bodies are inherently weak, they are susceptible to diseases which affect the Lungs, the Spleen (digestion) and the Liver. This explains why children so often have upper respiratory tract complaints such as colds, coughs, allergies and asthma, as well as digestive disorders like colic, vomiting, diarrhea, indigestion, and stomachache.

Diagnosis in Chinese medicine involves the classical procedures of observation, listening, questioning and palpation. Generally, on the child's initial visit the practitioner will try to determine whether the child is abnormally hot or cold, whether their Qi is sufficient or deficient, and whether there is some substance which needs to be eliminated from the body. The practitioner will look at the child's eyes, tongue, skin color and vein at the base of the index finger. This tells them whether the disease is hot or cold, an excess or deficiency, how far it has progressed, and how dangerous the condition is. The practitioner will also listen to the quality of the child's breathing, voice and speech. After the child's pulses have been palpated, questions will be asked about the child's history. Some questions are the same as a Western medical doctor might ask, while others are specific to Chinese medicine. A practitioner of TCM can then use this information to decide on the most appropriate treatment protocol.

Within Chinese medicine, there are four main methods of treating children: diet modification, herbal medicine, pediatric massage (Tui Na), and acupuncture. Because digestion plays such a pivotal role in the health and well being of infants and young children, the diet is extremely important in preventing and treating the most commonly encountered childhood diseases. What the average Western parent has been led to believe is a healthy diet for infants and children can be problematic according to TCM. Most pediatric diseases can be either completely eliminated or markedly relieved if one simply changes the diet of the child. Medicine may never have to play a role.

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When children are overfed their Stomach and Spleen are inundated with more food than they can deal with efficiently. This may lead to digestive system discomfort such as colic. Feeding on a schedule and in smaller amounts can significantly decrease colic, earaches, coughs and colds in infants. Limiting sweets, which damage the Spleen, and dairy foods, which are too dampening, is also important to a child's health. Ideally, children should be fed a diet high in complex carbohydrates and vegetables with small amounts of meat, eggs, and dairy.

## **Chinese Herbal Medicine**

Chinese herbal medicine is one of the most sophisticated herbal medicine systems in the world. Typically, combinations of six to 20 ingredients are used in formulas correlated to each individual's pattern of disharmony. The formulas are crafted together to act synergistically, each ingredient designed to accomplish a part of the overall process of restoring balance. Typically,

formulas for improving the general health of children consist of herbs which eliminate dampness and phlegm, fortify the Spleen, harmonize the Stomach, and clear abnormal heat from the Stomach and Intestines. 3 Chinese herbal prescriptions can include ingredients from the animal, mineral, and plant kingdoms. Typical ingredients include roots, barks, fruits, berries, twigs, stems, leaves and flowers.

There are a number of ways that Chinese herbal medicine can be dispensed for a child. Medicine such as pills, powders, tinctures and teas can be administered. With a few exceptions, teas should not be mixed in orange or other fruit juices, however a bit of honey or lemon may be added to help offset any bitter taste. Chinese herbal medicine is great for both preventative and remedial treatment in children . When a history of chronic and recurrent infections is not helped by diet modification for a child, medicine such as Chinese herbs is often a good choice. Chinese herbal medicine, when prescribed and dispensed by a licensed practitioner, is safe with few or no side effects.

### **Massage**

Chinese pediatric massage ( Tui Na ) can be a highly effective modality for treating commonly encountered pediatric diseases. A safe and gentle modality, m assage aids circulation, excretion and digestion, and reduces pain perception without side effects . Evidence has shown that in adults regular massage promotes stress relief, relaxation and maintenance of optimum health. Infants and children are no different; they love and benefit from massage.

Due to their rapidly growing bodies, infants consume large amounts of Qi . Therefore, the organs most responsible for producing Qi are frequently in a deficient state. 9 The conditions that are a result of these are often effectively treated with pediatric massage . Pediatric Tui Na prevents and treats pediatric disorders by using a special repertoire of points that are particular to children . Tui Na is useful for treating children up to the age of twelve, however, the younger the child is, the more effective the massage. 4 Usually a Tui Na treatment lasts 20-30 minutes and is performed with the child clothed or in their underwear or diaper. Pediatric Tui Na usually needs to be done frequently: every day for a couple of days for acute conditions, every other day for chronic conditions. 5

Pediatric massage is useful in comforting and calming infants and treating colic, vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, fever, earache and night crying. Regular daily preventative massage done by the parents will increase the circulation of Qi and blood, strengthen the immune system, and promote better sleeping and eating habits, socialization, coordination and disposition. Parents often use massage as a means of strengthening the bond with their children and keeping them calm, happy and healthy.

Acupuncture is the insertion of hair-thin, disposable metal needles through the skin in points on the body's meridians. Chinese medicine practitioners believe these meridians conduct Qi between the surface of the body and internal organs. The intent and benefit of acupuncture is to stimulate the body, release energy blocks, and reestablish normal equilibrium, thereby facilitating the body's natural ability to heal itself.

Acupuncture needles are solid, usually made of stainless steel and extremely flexible. Inserted a few millimeters into the skin, the small diameter and contoured shape of the acupuncture needle allows it to be inserted easily and painlessly. Acupuncture needles can also be stimulated with pressure, heat, friction or electromagnetic impulses to further activate a person's Qi . Acupuncture is very effective when used for quick relief of acute symptoms or pain, such as stomach upset.

To lessen any anxiety that may accompany a child's first acupuncture treatment, the acupuncturist may only needle points on the body out of the child's view. Other practitioners will stimulate the needle for a moment or two after insertion and then immediately remove it. In addition to acupuncture , a licensed acupuncturist may choose to use moxibustion. Moxibustion is the burning of a dried herb on, over or near various acupuncture points of the body. It is mainly used to warm up areas of the body which are too cold, disperse stagnation, or to add Qi to specific organs of the body. It is often used to treat Spleen and/or Kidney deficiency conditions. The area that is moxaed becomes slightly red and warm to the touch, but is not painful and does not cause a blister or burn. 7 Children typically find this procedure quite relaxing and calming.

Because children respond much more quickly to treatment than adults do, many acupuncturists will use fewer insertions than they would for an adult with the same condition. They may also reduce the amount of herbal medicine and the length of acupuncture treatment. There are also a number of treatments that do not require the actual insertion of needles. One such treatment is a Japanese style of pediatric acupuncture called "shonishin." This technique uses scrapers, combs, rollers, or brushes to stimulate various acupuncture points and channels at the surface of the child's body. It stimulates and balances the child's Qi without actually piercing the skin. Children typically love this and similar treatments because it is very soothing and comfortable. 6

## **The Future of Oriental Medicine**

In the last 40 years, Chinese and Western studies have suggested that the insertion of needles at acupuncture points helps release some chemical neurotransmitters in the body, including endorphins. Endorphins are the body's own extremely powerful, natural painkillers that bring about a sense of well being. Clinical studies of the benefit of acupuncture in the treatment of a wide range of illnesses have also led to acupuncture 's acceptance

beyond pain control to immune enhancement and increased energy and well being. A study from the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center using a scanning technique called SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography), found that acupuncture increases blood flow to the thalamus of the brain, an area that relays pain and other sensory messages. 1

A 1997 survey reported that over one million Americans were receiving acupuncture each year. Acupuncture has been cited by the World Health Organization to treat over forty-three conditions. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has cited it as an effective system of healthcare, stating "the data in support of acupuncture are as strong as those for many accepted Western medical therapies." 8

Since the 1997 endorsement by the NIH, interest in Chinese medicine is greater than ever before. There is an estimated 11,000 Licensed Acupuncturists in the United States and approximately 80 percent of the nation's insurers now cover acupuncture treatments. Americans have begun to recognize that Chinese medicine provides great insight into many health problems not dealt with completely or satisfactorily by modern Western medicine. It empowers people by giving simple reasons for why we get sick and tells us what we can do to prevent and treat those diseases. The fact that this medicine is gentle and free from side effects makes it an excellent choice for keeping young children healthy.

- The names of Chinese organs and systems do not necessarily correspond to the recognized physiologic organs.
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