

Acupuncture Research Update

"The most difficult times for many of us are the ones we give ourselves." - Pema

Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Immune System



A study published by the National Institutes of Health evaluated the efficacy of acupuncture for stimulating or regulating the immune system by comparing the results from several studies that each used different methods of acupuncture. Through the use of electroacupuncture, moxibustion, herbs and acupuncture, the studies concluded Traditional Chinese Medicine, TCM, can be helpful for the immune system. The combined studies demonstrated that moxibustion helped repair the gut mucosa of rats suffering from ulcerative colitis, electroacupuncture can increase the number of T cells in the body and that general acupuncture can decrease inflammation, which plays a vital role in the immune system.

Your immune system is what keeps you healthy and helps you ward off pathogens like the flu or a cold. Most of us don't spend a lot of time worrying about our immune system until we're sick. Then we reach for the over-the-counter medications to help relieve our symptoms. By looking to TCM instead, we can be proactive about supporting our immune systems in a safe and natural way.

According to TCM, the body is protected by something known as the Wei Qi (pronounced "way chee"). The Wei Qi, or defensive Qi, is comparable to the immune system in conventional medicine. It acts as the first line of defense when the body is under attack from external pathogens. If the Wei Qi is strong, then the body is capable of fighting off bacteria and viruses. Extreme stress, lack of sleep and a poor diet can all play into how strong the body's Wei Qi is and how well it performs.

There are multiple tools in the TCM practitioner's tool box that can assist in keeping the immune system strong and healthy, including acupuncture, moxibustion, electroacupuncture, herbs, cupping and nutrition.

Each of these tools has a similar effect on the body. TCM can regulate immune function, while also treating the underlying causes of the disease. This is done by reducing the symptoms, speeding up the healing, decreasing excess phlegm, decreasing inflammation and boosting the immune-mediated cells in the body that help ward off invasions.

Studies show regular acupuncture treatments can actually increase the number of T cells the body produces. T cells destroy harmful bacteria and viruses in the body. Acupuncture needles stimulate the brain into thinking an invader (virus or bacteria) has entered the body. The brain signals the increased release of T cells and white blood cells to fight off the intruder. The amazing part is the increased cellular response lasts for several days after the acupuncture treatment. Thus, receiving regular acupuncture treatments can actually prevent the body from getting sick.

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