

Chinese Medicine Newsletter - Winter 2007

Welcome to the winter edition of this newsletter. Please feel free to forward this to friends or family. One can sign up to receive this on an ongoing basis by visiting my website at www.acupuncturefamilyhealth.com.

As I have described in previous newsletters, in Chinese Medicine, organs and functions are associated with certain seasons. The season displays basic qualities that are reflected in the particular functions associated with it. The two organs associated with this time of year are the kidneys and the bladder, which are also connected with what is called the “water” element in Chinese medicine. One aspect of the water element is its connection with our “reservoirs” of deep energy.

I have also previously discussed the “basic substances” in Chinese Medicine. These form the basic components of our being. They are *qi* (pronounced chee), *blood*, *shen* (spirit), *jing* (essence) and *fluids*. The kidney energy plays a fundamental role in the formation and storage of *jing*, our deepest reservoir. Given the season, I’ll discuss it in more detail.

Jing (essence) in Chinese Medicine is the material and energetic foundation of yin and yang in our system. Chinese cosmology states that the entire universe is the play of yin and yang. Yin is the water aspect and yang is the fire aspect. Yin is that which is more cooling and yang is that which is more warming. Yin is more substantial and rooting, yang is more energetic and activating. Yin is contracting, yang is expanding. Yin is the substance of which we are composed (bones, flesh, blood, etc.) and yang is the energy and heat of our metabolic processes. They are the complimentary polarities that are expressed in every process in our system. They both emerge from a single source, our *jing*.

This *jing* is a combination of energy and substance that comes from two sources. They combine to form what is referred to as our *kidney jing*, the reservoir from which we draw throughout our lives. The first source is from our parents, the constitution that we inherit. It is referred to as *Pre-Heaven Jing*. We did not manufacture it. It is what we are bequeathed by our parents. This is passed to us at the time of conception and cannot be increased. The second source is called *Post-Heaven Jing*. Once we are born, we must generate this other aspect of *jing* on our own; extracting, refining and producing it from the food we eat, the air we breathe and the life experience we assimilate. This aspect of *jing* is a renewable resource.

Jing governs the unfoldment of cycles of life from infancy to old age. In this sense,

we all are born with the equivalent of a coiled spring of life force that naturally unwinds over the course of our lifetime. (This is our *Pre-Heaven* or inherited *jing*). It varies from individual to individual. It is our unique constitution. If not prematurely depleted, this *jing* will support us in living out our allotted life span in relatively good health. Ideally, during our lives we do not tap into our *Pre-Heaven Jing* (our non-renewable resource). This is possible if we are adequately generating the other aspect of our *kidney jing*, our renewable resource, *Post-Heaven Jing*, by living a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

However, most of us tap into our hereditary packet of *jing*, Instead of just using what we ourselves generate, we draw on our deeper reserves to keep us going. It is like constantly withdrawing money from our reserve savings account. There is relatively little harm if that happens on rare occasions, but if it becomes a consistent pattern, we are depleting our vital resources and leaving ourselves more vulnerable to illness and premature aging.

What are the ways this *jing* gets depleted? From the Chinese Medical perspective there are several ways. Serious illness can tap into our deeper reserves. For woman, sometimes childbirths too close together can be depleting. For men, excess sexual activity can potentially deplete *jing*. (what is “excess” here varies, depending on individual factors). Addictions and substance abuse diminish our essence. Working long hours in physically demanding environments depletes our core reserves. This is evident, for example, in the prematurely aged appearance of people in some third world countries who, out of necessity, have worked in challenging conditions since childhood.

We, in the more affluent societies, are shielded from the harsher physical conditions of life. Besides those factors mentioned above, our bank account of *jing* gets depleted mostly by unhealthy lifestyle factors, including poor diet, overwork, inadequate rest and sleep, emotional and environmental stressors, etc.

What can we do to preserve our *jing*, this precious resource? Most of us are aware of the lifestyle choices that are depleting, as opposed to renewing. To take one common example, caffeine, in Chinese Medicine, is seen not as food, but as a drug. It has the energetic quality of drawing energy from our core (our reserves of *jing*) and bringing it to the surface. We get a temporary rush of energy. However, caffeine, in the form of coffee, soft drinks, etc. does not replenish our core reserves, but over time depletes them. Occasional or measured use is generally not a significant problem. However, ongoing dependence as a source of energy over many years drains our *jing* and can leave us more vulnerable to ill health.

It's important to listen more carefully to our bodies in order to pick up the more subtle signals of stress. When not attuned to our system's capacity in any given circumstance, we many times use our willpower to push ourselves beyond our resources and further use up our storehouse of energy. This could be in any kind of endeavor, work or recreational, where we regularly overextend ourselves to the point of depletion. Eventually, if this goes on long enough, our bodies finally break down under the stress and get sick. It is as if our system finally says, "Okay, you've ignored the plethora of subtle and not so subtle messages I've been giving you to slow down, take better care, etc. Now I'm going to make it impossible for you to continue in this unhealthy way. You're going to be on your back for two weeks and you will have to rest!"

We all are also aware of how holding certain attitudes can be either supportive or debilitating. Just as food and air constantly nourish our system, our thoughts and beliefs are emotional, mental and spiritual food. What is the quality of this nourishment? A useful exercise can be to regularly review our day to better appreciate how our reactions to events and circumstances affects our vitality and state of mind. A good time to do this is while in bed before going to sleep. Simply review your day in reverse order, i.e from the nighttime all the way back to when you first awoke. Try to remember as many details as possible. See all the situations and interactions you experienced and how you responded. With practice, this can be accomplished in just a few minutes. Did your reactions support or undermine your well being? How much vital energy are you spending in habitually unproductive and debilitating responses to life? In what situations were you more balanced, thus calmer, more energized, more present and thus more effective? You will get a very accurate picture of how you are depleting or preserving your precious resource of *jing* throughout the day.

Acupuncture and Chinese herbs can also help restore our reserves, as well as other enhancing therapies.

Nature reminds us that winter is a time of consolidating resources, building reserves and resting in anticipation of the dynamic renewal in the spring. Much of the natural world is in a state of hibernation. We can symbolically hibernate by allowing time to focus inwardly, nourishing our need for contemplation, rest and relaxation.

Enjoy the season,
Bob

