

Flu, Birds & Worry

The beginning of this year's cold and flu season has been accompanied by much publicized concern about a possible pandemic stemming from avian or 'bird' flu virus. While there is rampant speculation about vaccines and the few medications available to treat a possible outbreak, there are several common sense approaches that we can immediately implement in our daily lives. Chinese herbal formulas offer several options for prevention and minimizing flu symptoms. The Chinese energetic approach to emotions, such as worry, can also provide insight on how to maintain our health and be less susceptible to the impact of 'bird' or any other type of flu.

Chinese Herbal Strategies

In last winter's issue of the **Well**, I wrote an article about Chinese herbal strategies for cold & flu. I will summarize that information here and will also make reprints of the full article available.

Formulas – There are many Chinese herbal formulas available. Each are focused on a particular stage of the cold process: prevention, initial symptoms, secondary development, and deeper lung involvement.

Timing – The most effective use of herbs is to take them as an ongoing constitutional strengthening, preventatively, when first exposed, or as soon as possible after first symptoms.

Dosage – The herb dosage must match the severity of the symptoms. Some people have the right formula and begin quickly, but do not take a high enough dose.

Other Formulas – If the initial stage formula is not effective, it is important to change to another formula to follow the cold's progression. Preventive and constitutional formulas are important ways to strengthen ourselves and so be less likely to contract a cold.

Chinese herbs are not a substitute for potential 'bird flu' vaccines or treatment; however, they can be a useful complementary approach.



Worry

The publicity of the possible flu effects has sometimes bordered on the sensational. Even with good intention often the speculation of what *might* occur leads some people through an escalating process from concern to worry, anxiety and panic. The Chinese energetic model is a useful way to understand how extreme emotions such as these can have a negative impact on our health, leaving us **more** susceptible to the very health issue that triggers the emotion. By exploring the energetic dynamics we can learn how degree of emotional balance can impact our well-being.

The Chinese energetic model attributes a range of emotions to each organ system. Associated emotions with each organ are said to have a similar quality as the organ energy. Each emotion can influence, either in a positive or negative way, the organ and all of the functions related to that organ.

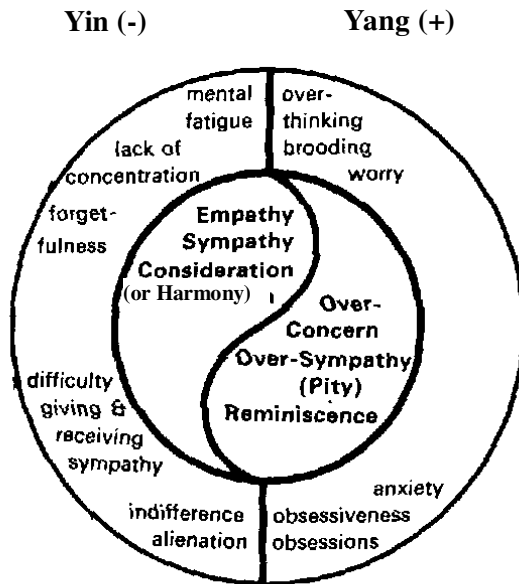
In a balanced or 'normal' state, emotions arise, flow and transform. It is normal to respond to life with emotion, even strong emotion in proportion to the situation. Balance is moving in and out of emotional states according to the situation. Imbalance occurs when emotional energy becomes stuck in one area, either being over or under expressed. Generally this leads to

escalating degrees of that emotional energy, such as concern growing into worry, anxiety, or panic.

The base emotions for the spleen are harmony and balance. Under a stressful situation, concern may arise and when expressed, explored, acted upon or somehow processed, the concern can revert back to harmony and balance. However, if concern is not attended to properly, it may become over expressed as worry and anxiety or under expressed as indifference and alienation.

When spleen emotions get stuck or escalate into stronger levels without reverting back to balance, the energy of the spleen suffers. The constant emotional drain consumes spleen energy that would normally be used to nourish body, mind, and spirit.

An analogy is water in a garden. Balanced watering allows plants to flourish. Too little water and plants wither. Too much water and plants rot.



Range of spleen emotions within two concentric yin yang circles; yin on the left, yang on the right. The core circle shows base partners; the outer circle shows increased distressed partners. I consider the core yin emotions as harmony. From Teegarden, The Joy of Feeling.

It is similar with emotions and our organs. In the example of the spleen, staying stuck in a worry state can eventually weaken our energetic and physical condition, leaving us more susceptible to flu or any other health issue that may arise. Each organ also has relationships with other organs, such as the spleen nourishes the lungs. If excess worry drains spleen energy, the lungs will eventually be under nourished, allowing a simple cold to become a much deeper and more serious lung condition, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

Once we realize the extent that excessive worry or any other imbalanced emotion has on our body and mind, it becomes easier to take steps to restore balance. While it is usually difficult to just tell ourselves to stop worrying, we can cultivate the partner emotion, in this case harmony. This is a way of increasing the positive emotion so the negative emotion (worry) is not so strong. If worry starts to increase, anything that increases our natural sense of harmony and balance can help. I

enjoy activities such as tai chi and meditation to cultivate harmony, but whatever works naturally for each person is ultimately effective.

This article has focused on worry and the spleen as an example. All of the organs have their own emotional spectrum of balanced and imbalanced emotions.

Regardless whether the “bird” virus generates a pandemic, there are many current events

which may trigger strong emotional responses. It may be helpful to know how to take some common sense actions in our daily lives. Chinese herbs and learning how to lessen the impact of excessive worrying are two examples of positive approaches to maintaining a healthier body and mind.

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