

## **PMS: Is Your Liver To Blame?**

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, organs represent much more than solely their physical units. They refer to energetic systems where each has a correlated acupuncture channel, sensory organ, bodily tissue, emotion and set of functions.

We are going to explore the Liver organ system in Chinese medicine and see how it may be the focus in treatment of the notorious premenstrual syndrome.

Firstly, each organ has an associated channel laden with acupuncture points. The Liver channel begins at the big toe. It climbs up the shinbone, circles the reproductive organs, traverses the breasts, and has an inner pathway connecting it to the eyes and forehead. Its paired channel, which serves as an overflow tank for congestion, is the Gall Bladder channel. Its path also encircles the breast and is heavily distributed over the sides of the head. From the trajectory of these channels alone, we see that some of the major complaints of PMS, e.g. lower abdominal cramping, breast distention, and headaches, occur along the Liver and Gall Bladder channel systems.

Now, let's take a look at the Liver's function in Chinese Medicine. Its main role is to ensure that the body's Qi moves in a smooth and patent way. Therefore, any bodily activity that is cyclical in nature requires a well-functioning Liver. For example, a healthy emotional makeup constitutes a smooth and appropriate response to external stimuli. When the Liver fails to maintain the patency of Qi, some common complaints may be mood swings, anxiety, and depression.

The menstrual cycle itself demands a delicate interaction between hormones, time frames and bodily responses. (See cover article)

Another of the Liver's function is 'the storage of Blood'. It is this role that implicates the Liver in many menstrual irregularities. If the Blood of the Liver is deficient there may be delayed menstrual periods or amenorrhea.

Whereas, if there is excess heat in the Blood, there may be spotting between periods or a heavy menstrual flow. As stated above, each organ system has with it an associated emotion. The Liver is correlated with the emotion of anger. Anger, here encompasses resentment, frustration, guilt, and bottled-up emotions. These may either be the cause of a hampered Liver function or an outward sign that the Liver's role of ensuring the smooth flow of Qi is damaged.

Let's see how PMS is viewed through the eyes of Traditional Chinese Medicine. A woman's cycle, in short, is characterized by the building up of Qi and Blood throughout the month to support the possibly fertilized egg and ensuing pregnancy. The menses are the release of this unused Qi and Blood. This process requires high precision on the part of the Liver. However, the Liver has been termed, by the classical Chinese medical texts, as the 'tender organ' since it is easily disturbed by emotional upsets, poor dietary habits, or an overly stressful life. When this occurs, the Qi of the Liver begins to stagnate and back up. This can manifest on a physical and/or emotional level. Menstrual cramps, breast distention, and lower abdominal bloating are the result of the Qi becoming stuck along Liver channel. These complaint as many others should be relieved with the onset of bleeding as this releases the stagnant Qi and Blood. Emotional changes and irritability are the result of the Qi failing to maintain a smooth emotional response.

The treatment for PMS would comprise a multi-faceted approach incorporating many of the modalities of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Acupuncture, probably the most well known branch, would function to free up any blockages in the acupuncture channels. Its calming affect would directly and profoundly affect the emotional roller coaster along with aiding menstrual cramping. An herbal formula would be selected or custom-made based on that particular individual's imbalances. This would take into account each person's internal landscape and constitution. Chinese herbal therapy seeks to combine anywhere from 5 to 15 herbal components all of which work synergistically to treat the person as a whole and not just alleviating the symptoms. As soon as the Liver regains its control over the smooth flow of Qi and adequate Blood is being stored, then an improvement in the condition will be observed.

This approach attempts to balance the person and the root of the problem, which will effect a permanent change. Traditional Chinese Medicine recognizes that each person is a composite of both the physical and psycho-emotional. Chinese medicine is not interested in treating premenstrual syndrome; rather, it focuses on how that disorder manifests through the individual. What changes in the energetics of the person are taking place and how can they be corrected? To really attain health and balance, we must treat a person in a holistic manner. Perhaps it all starts with your Liver...

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