

FATIGUE

Fatigue is a state of awareness with a range of mental and physical afflictions such as lethargy, exhaustion, muscle weakness and burning, and a decreased level of attentiveness.

Temporary fatigue is a common condition usually resulting from minor illness such as a cold, flu, or infection. Chronic fatigue lasts 6 months or longer and can be a symptom of various diseases either physical or psychological.

“Chronic Fatigue Syndrome” is a persistent or relapsing fatigue with accompanying symptoms such as memory loss and an inability to concentrate, along with muscle pain.

“Adrenal Fatigue” is a term applied to non-specific symptoms such as body aches, fatigue, nervousness, sleep problems, low blood pressure, light-headedness, and digestive disorders. It is estimated that 80% of North Americans have experienced some form of adrenal fatigue at some point in their lives.

“Muscle Fatigue” is a term used to describe the inability to exert sufficient muscle force. It is often associated with athletes but can also accompany diseases such as fibromyalgia.

TCM Diagnosis and Treatment of Fatigue

In TCM terms, there is no such thing as “Chronic Fatigue Syndrome” or any other fatigue syndrome. Rather, when a patient complains of fatigue, the practitioner looks for the root cause and pattern behind the fatigue. Poor lifestyle habits may be contributing factors such as lack of sleep, poor diet, insufficient exercise, overwork, etc. The most common diagnoses for chronic fatigue in TCM are blood or qi deficiency. Symptoms can be either physical or psychological.

Once the pattern is identified, a treatment protocol is established. Chinese herbal medicines used are usually tonics that nourish the blood such as Liu Wei Di Huang Wan and sleep remedies such as Yi Gan San.

Acupuncture and moxibustion are also commonly used to treat fatigue.

Case Studies

Case 1 is a 46 yr old male diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome for 2 years. In addition to feeling tired he had trouble falling asleep and didn't feel rested in the morning.

Case 2 is a female patient diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome 6 months after a car accident. She had become so incapacitated she was forced to quit her job. She had no appetite and as a result dropped 20 pounds and became extremely weak.

In both cases acupuncture was used along with Yoga and Tai Chi. The initial course of treatment ranged from 3 – 6 months with 1 – 2 sessions per week, then a gradual reduction in treatment frequency over the next 6 months.

After 3 months, the case 1 patient was able to return to his job working half days and resumed his full time job and regular lifestyle after 1 year. The case 2 patient made a full recovery from both the CFB and car accident after 14 months of treatment.

Summary

Syndromes characterized by fatigue have been documented in TCM literature dating back hundreds, if not thousands of years. Although CFS is not a defined “syndrome” in TCM, it has been successfully resolved with acupuncture and herbal medicine.