

Is it Time for a Liver Tune-Up?



In Traditional Chinese Medicine, each season is ruled by a particular organ system and spring is connected to the liver and gallbladder. What does this mean? You probably notice changes in the way you feel, both physically and mentally, as the seasons change. Many of us feel more contemplative and introspective during the winter months. Once spring hits, we may feel ready to recharge and get things done.

As with any seasonal change, we must pay close attention to our body's needs during this turbulent time of seasonal change. Moving from the indoor sleepy coldness of winter and into the warm, active spirit of spring can be tough on your system when not handled with care.

Spring is the season of the Liver and Gallbladder. Now, it is important to note, that from a Chinese Medicine perspective, when we talk about a particular organ, such as the liver or gallbladder, we are not talking about the physical organ that sits inside your body. Rather, we are talking about a complex system of energy that flows within particular pathways and has a particular physiological function.

The gallbladder governs decision-making and controls the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the body. The liver is in charge of detoxification and keeping the energy or Qi (pronounced "chee") flowing smoothly. Liver energy is strong and assertive, the type of energy you need to create plans and propel them into motion. However, if your liver is out of balance, you might notice that you are more irritable or on edge than usual. The liver tends to be a bit of a "bully" for many people, overwhelming bodily systems, so it's important to keep it healthy.

Here are a few signs that your liver is in need of an acupuncture tune-up:

1. You've noticed an increase in headaches, and these headaches seem to feel worse when you aren't active. Generally, headaches tend to manifest at the top of your head.

2. You feel constipated or bloated. Your bowel movements have become irregular, alternating between constipation and loose stools. Hard, difficult stools that appear pebbly are also a sign of liver imbalance.

3. Friends and coworkers are scared of you because you are cranky, cranky, cranky! When liver energy is out of balance, you can feel agitated, irritated, and generally out of sorts. Sometimes irritation flares into outright anger more easily than it would if this energy was flowing smoothly.

4. You may notice PMS symptoms have been worsening. Bloating, breast tenderness, sensitivity can all be exacerbated by liver imbalance. If your periods are more painful or clotted, this can also be due to a stagnation of liver energy.

5. Shoulders, neck, or jaw are uncomfortably tight. If the liver energy is out of balance, it can flow upward. This causes inflexibility, and everything in your body to "rise up": you might grind or clench your teeth, hold your shoulders up, experience symptoms of TMJ, or have headaches at the top of your head.

6. Maybe you've noticed that your allergies are in full force, complete with itchy, red, irritated, and watery eyes.

6 Ways to Rebalance Your Liver and Gallbladder

Stretch! Stretching enlivens the connective tissue, which the gallbladder system controls. Take a yoga class, or devote some extra time to stretching post-workout. In particular, try to incorporate stretches that get to the sides of your body, as this is gallbladder meridian territory.

Move. Of all the systems in the body, the gallbladder system perhaps craves movement the most. The gallbladder meridian will become cranky and painful with a lack of movement. So do your best to incorporate some sort of exercise each day.

Get outside. Spending more time outside is another easy and powerful way to strengthen the liver and gallbladder energies in the spring. For people with kids and families, getting outside is an excellent way to stay healthy and have fun together.

Eat more greens. Eating fresh leafy greens is supportive of the liver's detoxification function and can also help strengthen vision.

Avoid overstimulation. It is also recommended to avoid excessive stimulants during the spring months. Things like coffee and caffeine supplements are considered expansive and energizing, which can be somewhat helpful during the cold winter months. However, during the spring, when life is abounding, excess energy can actually become harmful to the body. Symptoms can manifest themselves as headaches, insomnia, anger, and more.

Get your seasonal tune-up. To keep the liver and gallbladder working smoothly, things like acupuncture, herbal formulas, and nutritional counseling can make a world of difference. Acupuncture can balance the body as it reacts to the changes in the weather and activity levels. Regular acupuncture treatments have also been shown to boost immunity.

Spring can also cause flare-ups associated with seasonal allergies and acupuncture treatments can help with the inflammation, sneezing, runny nose, chest congestion, and watery eyes that accompany the allergic reactions. But most of all, acupuncture can help regulate those emotional imbalances that are often common during this transitional period.



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