



Arthritis

Arthritis is a broad term for many different musculoskeletal disorders. It is related to damage or degeneration of joint cartilage and bone. Arthritis can cause severe pain and discomfort and can have huge impacts on the quality of a person's life.

The most common type of arthritis is osteoarthritis, which can be hereditary and is a gradual breakdown of a joint, most often affecting the spine, knees, hands or feet. Rheumatoid arthritis applies to inflammatory episodes, which can cause severe damage to joints over a shorter period of time.

Pre existing factors attributed with arthritis include: genetics, injuries, obesity and smoking. Rheumatoid arthritis is often linked with auto-immune disorders. Other than these factors, Western medicine has difficulty in explaining why arthritis occurs and apart from reducing inflammation has limited treatment options. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) takes a slightly different view...

It's going to rain. I can feel it in my bones!

Perhaps not such an old wives tale after all, as the weather can impact the health of our joints, according to TCM. In TCM the concept of Qi(energy) flowing in channels through our body is particularly important when considering joints. If a joint is arthritic the Qi will be blocked or stagnate. Damp and cold weather can further constrict the flow of our Qi which can then lead to swelling, pain and restricted movement.

Similar to the wind and cold, hot and humid weather can also influence and possibly agitate arthritic pain. Qi blockage can cause what is called internal heat in TCM.

This internal heat reflects inflammation which make the joints swell and become red, hot and sore. Often this pattern is worse at night.

In Chinese medicine the health of our organ system will always impact the rest of our body, and each organ is closely linked with other parts of the body. The kidneys, as an example, are said to store our "essence" or our core Qi and are closely related to our bones. If the Qi of our Kidneys is weakened due to overexertion (such as excessive work or play), the skeletal system will get less nourishment and some areas may be prone to degeneration or arthritic change. Often the pain or inflammation will be worse with fatigue or stress.

Relief is at hand

Whether or not the arthritis is exacerbated by hot, cold, humid weather, or the body's internal health, Chinese medicine treatments can help. It is impossible to reverse progressed degeneration but it certainly can be slowed and the uncomfortable symptoms can generally always be reduced and managed.

Treatments with acupuncture and massage will help isolated arthritic joints and issues such as lower back pain or knee swelling can improve with regular treatments and appropriate exercises. In addition strong topical liniments or herbal based plasters will promote blood flow and ease swelling.

If arthritis is affecting multiple joints such as fingers or toes, Chinese herbal medicine will often be a more effective form of treatment. Herbs can be used to reduce swelling and inflammation, and to nourish the kidneys. Thereby strengthening the body, treating the cause, and helping slow down the wear and tear of joints. Generic patent Chinese medicine products are available over the counter. However for a more specific diagnosis and stronger and more effective results a consultation with a TCM practitioner is recommended.

Handy hints to help

- If walking is too painful try the local pool to keep the **joints mobile**.
- **Strengthening and conditioning** is crucial to support degenerated joints. Not only the gym but Tai Chi, Yoga or Pilates might be the go.
- Strong liniments like Kwan Loong or herbal plasters like Salonpas can be used topically daily to give **effective temporary relief**. These products are available at Gardenvale Traditional Chinese Medicine.
- A **healthy balanced diet** with adequate amounts of essential fatty oils (such as fish oil) is important to maintain good joint and bone health.