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Nourish, Stimulate, and Calm Your Brain

Having difficulties focusing, remembering tasks or organizing your thoughts?

It may sound strange to learn that cognitive function is not solely the job of the brain alone; other parts and organs of the body are involved—the heart and kidneys both partner with the brain to nurture a healthy and attentive mind. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help optimize your brain power through a treatment approach that incorporates different modalities, including nutritional support.



One reason why the heart needs constant attention is because it must constantly pump blood throughout the body via the blood vessels. Oxygen and vital substances are delivered to the brain in this manner to stimulate or calm it. The heart also has another important responsibility relating to the sustainability of the brain: to house the *Shen*.

The concept of the *Shen* can be described as the spirit or mind of a person. According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the spirit, or *Shen*, embodies consciousness, emotions and thought. *Shen* influences long-term memory and the ability to think clearly, contributes to wisdom, and presides over activities that involve mental and creative functions. When the mind is healthy, we are able to think clearly. When the mind is unhealthy or unbalanced, we experience confusion, poor memory and clouded thinking.

The kidneys also contribute to a healthy brain as they supply a vital substance called *Jing*, which then produces *marrow*. *Jing* is a unique, fundamental substance necessary for human life. *Marrow* is the material foundation for the central nervous system and is the matter that 'fills up' the brain, thus the brain is referred to as the *Sea of Marrow*.

The *Sea of Marrow* is indispensable for memory and concentration. It also rules over the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing and seeing. It is natural for the *Sea of Marrow* to wane as we grow older. However, there are acupuncture and Oriental medicine treatments that can help nurture even the most mature brain.

A healthy mind involves harmony between the brain (*Sea of Marrow*) and the spirit (*Shen*). Disharmony of the mind often manifests as anxiety, insomnia, muddled thinking, forgetfulness and chronic restlessness. Meditation and acupuncture, as well as diet and physical exercises such as Tai Chi or Qi Gong can balance and strengthen the mind.

Want to optimize your cognitive function and mental health? Call for a consultation today!

Challenge Your Brain

Keep your mind active and challenged. Brain function decreases with age. Studies show that cognitive exercise can improve blood flow to the brain. Spend at least 15 minutes each day on a mental exercise such as a crossword puzzle, journaling or learning a new language in order to slow memory loss.

However you choose to exercise your brain, acupuncture can help. Numerous studies suggest that acupuncture can help improve memory, mental clarity, concentration and cognitive function.



One recently published study showed how acupuncture can be used to help patients with vascular dementia. Cerebral functional imaging before and after acupuncture treatments showed a significant increase in the cerebral glucose metabolism of the brain, which is associated with improved cognitive function.

Other studies have looked at how acupuncture affects the performance of students taking an exam or those with Alzheimer's disease and memory impairment induced by diabetes and cerebral ischemia. All results, thus far, have been positive.

Good Nutrition Boosts Brain Power

Looking to support your health and also boost your brain function? Good nutrition can help boost your brain power. Not only is it essential to overall physical health, it can also enhance the function and harmony of the mind.

The right foods enhance brain function by providing essential nutrients such as flavonoids, Omega 3s, vitamins, folate and iron--all great for improving the quality and quantity of learning capacity, cognitive abilities, memory and overall brain function.

Where to begin? First of all, avoid excess. According to Oriental medicine, overindulging in food or drink can impair your *Qi*--the energy which powers the body and the mind. Greasy, fatty, spicy and sweet foods can also lead to "stuck" *Qi*, worsening any symptoms of foginess or sluggishness.

So how can you support your brain and body health with food? Consider these foods and their benefits for your brain and body:

Walnuts for Memory

Walnuts are a good source of vitamins B and E, which may support memory function and slow cell aging. Try eating 1-2 walnuts per day for optimal brain function. Nuts and seeds are rich in omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, folate, vitamin E, vitamin B6 and zinc, all of which allow you to think more clearly. Seeds and nuts rich in thiamine and magnesium are great for memory, cognitive function and brain nourishment.

Leafy Greens for Concentration, Recall and Understanding

Cooked leafy greens support the *Yin*, which, according to Oriental medicine, enables better concentration and deep rest. Vegetables such as cabbage, kale, spinach, collards, turnip greens and others are rich in vitamins, folate and iron, all of which are essential for memory recall and increasing cognitive activity. Oriental medicine considers cooked foods easier to digest, so throw them in soup, steam them or stir-fry.

Water for a Calm and Restful Mind

According to Oriental medicine, drinking water is a crucial way to nourish your *Yin*, calming the mind and improving your rest. Oriental medicine recommends drinking warm water to support the body's internal temperature.

Substitute any beverages with pure water to transport nutrients during digestion, to act as fluid between the joints, and help regulate our temperature and skin (via perspiration). As a broad guideline, drink half your weight in ounces of water.

Berries to Improve Learning Capacity

Most berries contain fisetin and flavonoids, which are great for improving your memory and allowing you to easily recall past events. Blueberries are well known for their role in improving motor skills and overall learning capacity.

Acupuncutre in the Summer!

As summer is approaching, here are some helpful information regarding the important issue of dehydration

Most of the body's water is found within the cells. The rest is found in blood vessels and in the spaces between the cells (interstitial spaces). Dehydration occurs when the amount of water leaving the body is greater than the amount taken in. We lose water from the body when breathing, sweating, urinating, and having a bowel movement.

Have you ever found yourself at the end of the day, sadly realizing you hardly drank any water? I find this to be true not only for many patients, but sometimes even for myself. This lifestyle pattern, over time, leads to chronic dehydration. Most people have no idea they are experiencing chronic dehydration. Acute dehydration is pretty easy to watch for because it usually occurs with severe vomiting or diarrhea. (We'll talk about symptoms of "chronic" dehydration further below.)

TCM Pattern Analysis

Whether you are thinking of TCM in the role of pattern identification or in the role of each organ system, you cannot discount the importance of drinking water. Let's take a quick look at the yin channels:

Without enough water, the Chinese organ systems cannot function at optimum capacity, which leads to the formation of typical TCM pattern presentations including the invasion of phlegm, damp, cold, heat, and toxicity.

Blood stagnation is a common pattern in an acupuncture clinic, because so many patients present with pain-related issues. Considering 83% of our blood is composed of water, imagine the effects if we don't replenish water regularly. If the body doesn't have enough blood, then movement through the vessels becomes sluggish and "stagnant." Pain is the primary symptom of blood stagnation. I'm sure you can relate to the heavy sluggish feeling throughout the body when the spleen is overloaded with "dampness." Dampness kind of feels like pudding is moving through the body, slow and hesitant. Water is a perfect cleansing agent for "dampness". Obviously, all 12 organ systems function better with the addition of a healthy supply of water on a daily basis.

Western Symptom Analysis

Blood travels 12,000 miles per day through the blood vessels and is responsible for delivering the necessary substances to the cells throughout the body. Chronic dehydration keeps the body from functioning at maximum capacity. If the blood is supposed to travel 12,000 miles but can't, then major functioning problems will occur.

Some of the symptoms of chronic (even mild) dehydration are as follows:

Fatigue: Slow enzyme activity. Enzymes travel through the blood stream.

Tension headaches: Tension headaches often come because of fatigue and toxic build up in the muscles. Fatigue and toxicity are both side effects of chronic dehydration.

Constipation: Waste moves slowly through the large intestine when water intake is decreased. Drinking water causes the motillin to be secreted. Motillin is a hormone that causes rhythmic contractions in the intestines leading to regular bowel movements.

Stomach Ulcers: Digestive juices are made from water. If secretion of digestive fluids decreases, the stomach becomes more acidic and ulcerations occur.

High Cholesterol: Dehydration causes fluid to release from the lining of the cells. The body has a natural protection mechanism to keep the cells from leaking too much cellular fluid. Excess cholesterol is formed to line the cell as a protective sealant to keep water in.

Respiratory Problems: Mucous membranes lining the mouth and nose need to be moist in order to protect against the inhalation of pathogens. Histamine, a chemical that produces symptoms of an allergic reaction, increases exponentially as the body loses more and more water. According to some sources, chronic dehydration is the primary causes of allergies and asthma in the human body.

Excess Weight/Obesity: Fatigue is an indication that cells are lacking in water. Often people rely on gaining energy from food rather than water leading them to overeat, when in reality they are just thirsty.

Eczema/Skin Disorders: Sweat helps to excrete toxins from the body. Not enough water means not enough sweat. With dehydration, toxins are not eliminated properly through the skin, making the skin vulnerable to all kinds of skin disorders.

UTI/Cystitis: If toxins in the urine are not sufficiently diluted, they attack the urinary mucous membranes. When the body is dehydrated, toxins are not eliminated and accumulate as acid waste, creating an environment that breeds bacteria leading to infection, inflammation and pain.

Joint Pain and Weakness: Cartilage is mainly composed of water. Joints have cartilage for padding, to protect bone structures and provide lubrication. Dehydration causes weakness of the cartilage and slows the process of joint repair.

Low Blood Pressure: Too little water leads to not enough blood volume to completely fill the arteries, veins and capillaries.

High Blood Pressure: When the body is dehydrated, blood thickens and causes resistance in the blood flow. This leads to high blood pressure.

Boost Your Mental Energy, Recall, and Focus

Are you having difficulties recalling what you ate for dinner last night, or do you tend to forget what you are talking about in mid conversation? Do you have trouble coming up with new ideas or find yourself having to study twice as much to retain half the information?

Fuzzy thinking can muddle our words as much as our thoughts. It can drain our creative juices, zap our confidence and make us question our intelligence.

Here are a few acupressure exercises to improve your mental function:

Mental Energy Boost

For a quick boost of mental energy, press point *Shuigou*. It is located between the bottom of your nose and your upper lip, in the vertical groove that is technically called the philtrum. Simply tap the area with moderate force for about 30 seconds to help revitalize your mind and bring your awareness back to the present moment.

Memory Recall Boost

When you're struggling to recall information and can't quite do it, try applying pressure to point *Yangbai*. To locate this point, find the middle of your eyebrows with your fingertips and slide upwards about half an inch. Just press and make tiny circular motions for a minute or two. Doing this gentle exercise may help coax the information from your mind you are looking for.

Focus and Learning Boost

To enhance your focus and learning ability press on point *Yintang*, located between the eyebrows and sometimes referred to as "the third eye." The translation for *Yintang*, is "hall of impression."

A "hall" is defined as a corridor or passageway, or the large entrance room of a house. An "impression" is defined as a strong effect produced on the intellect, emotions or conscience. Thus, *Yintang* is the entrance or passageway to the mind.

Yintang is used to improve mental clarity, concentration and cognitive function, as well as soothe emotions and relieve stress, anxiety and agitation.



For effective self-administered acupressure:

- Breathe deeply
 - Focus on the point as pressure is applied
 - Pressure should be strong but not uncomfortable
 - Begin when you first feel symptoms and continue until they subside
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