

Deficiency and Excess: a TCM Perspective

Chinese Medicine helps people become or stay healthy by creating balance within the system. Whether it be yin and yang, moisture and dryness, blood and qi, it is the relationship of these that point to a state of balance or pathology. Deficiency and excess of one or the other substance or qualities informs the treatment plan. In some cases, it may be clear whether an individual is dealing with excess or deficiency; at other times, a practitioner may need to peel back layers of information to get at the root cause of the imbalance.

Our modern lifestyles tend to breed patterns of imbalance that look like deficiency, but are actually rooted in excess.¹ In our day to day lives, we are often driven by stress and anxiety, many of us fuel our bodies with excessively fatty, salty, and sugary foods that lead to poor health. Individuals experience such problems as high blood pressure, atherosclerosis, Type II diabetes, insomnia, and panic attacks. People who do not experience these types of pathology, may not recognize that their system is out of balance until patterns of excess actually burn them out and symptoms of deficiency, such as extreme exhaustion, colds and flus, depression, and poor digestion surface. While it may be beneficial to treat the symptoms of deficiency, in such cases, it is necessary to address the root causes of excess in order to truly bring the person back into balance.

One of my favorite examples of a deficiency that can be mistaken for excess is that of hot flashes common to women traversing menopause. Believe it or not, these hot flashes are referred to as a false or empty heat. If you have experienced these hot flashes or ever witnessed someone having one, you may be scratching your head, "How can this be considered false?" After all, during a hot flash, one breaks out in a sweat, goes flush, experiences increased heart rate, and may even feel dizzy. This is very real, nothing false about it! However, the heat does not stay; typically hot flashes pass within a few minutes. The real cause of hot flashes is a yin deficiency, such that the yin (cooling energy) is not able to keep the yang fire down. It is even possible that a person experiencing hot flashes could present with a yang deficiency, in which the yang is still much stronger than the deficient yin. So, before draining the yang in this case, it would be best to build the yin!

Another example for exploring the dynamic relationships of excess and deficiency is that of edema. On the surface, this may simply appear to be an excess of moisture or blood that needs to be drained. However, it is more likely that there is a deficiency of qi somewhere in the meridian cycle. A likely cause is that the spleen meridian may be exhibiting deficient qi and, therefore, not transporting fluids efficiently through the body. So, we build the spleen through working with several appropriate acupuncture points, addressing dietary concerns to build the

spleen-stomach meridian system, and exploring ways that the individual can receive nurturing in his or her life.

Five-element Chinese Medicine adds yet another layer of information to help bring people's systems back into balance. For instance, if a person whose primary element is earth (associated with the spleen/stomach) shows a deficiency in their Lung (metal element) meridian system, then simply addressing the deficiency in the Lung meridian is unlikely to resolve the problem. They may continue to go out of balance until their earth element is nurtured and strengthened. After all, in 5-element theory, earth breeds metal.

As you can see, investigating the root causes of imbalance and pathology is not always a simple task of looking at the symptoms on the surface. Further investigation, familiarity with a person's overall lifestyle, as well as an individual's unique elemental constitution provide valuable information for bringing that person back into a balanced state of health and wellness.

In my Tui Na and Acupressure practice, I always seek to understand these dynamic aspects of each individual with whom I work. This information informs my intuitive senses as I work with your meridians, muscular-tendon systems, and 5-element presentation.

¹ Pitchford, Paul. *Healing with Whole Foods*. 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2002.

May peace and health be upon you!