# DEPRESSION:
## TCM VS WESTERN MEDICINE

In the West, until very recently, Depression has been oversimplified and described as a chemical imbalance, mainly of the neurotransmitter Serotonin. In actuality, there appears to be no link between measurable serotonin concentration and depression.[1] The 'chemical imbalance' theory fails to recognize the complexity of our human systems. There is such a dynamic interplay of chemical and physiological forces throughout the brain and body that affect our moods and how we perceive life. TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) theory sees this in terms of energy balancing. The energy balance is affected by many factors, including stress, sleep, exercise, diet, genetics, physical and emotional trauma, toxins and pathogens. Basically, anything that can disrupt the natural flow of the qi (energy) of the body can be a factor in the development and prognosis of Depression.

In the Western world, depression, characterized by episodes of sadness, irritability and loss of interest, is generally treated with medication, talk therapy, or both. However, as many as 34% of those with depression don't improve with medication or therapy and as many as half will experience depression again despite ongoing treatment.[2] The severity of this disease is highlighted in the fact that over 700,000 people worldwide (at least 45,000 within the US alone[3]) die due to suicide every year.

Commonly prescribed medications boost the concentration of neurotransmitters, like serotonin, in the brain, based on the premise that the rise in neurotransmitter levels will lift the depression. However, improvement only comes after weeks on the drugs, not immediately as it would if it were the direct result of chemical concentrations. New theories suggest that the anti-depressive effects of these medications are actually a result of nerve growth and new neural connections, a process that takes weeks. In fact, animal studies have shown that antidepressants do provoke new nerve cell growth and connections.[4] So it seems one key in the treatment of depression is the stimulation of neurogenesis: creating new pathways for information exchange.

While these medications show some benefits for this reason, they come with a price. More than half of the people who take antidepressants report side effects such as headaches, dizziness, brain fog, weight gain, sleep disorders, sexual, digestive and skin issues among others.[5] Even suicidal thoughts can increase from both the introduction of antidepressents[6] as well as the challenges of withdrawal.[7]

Meanwhile, TCM practitioners focus on the bigger picture of energy balance. They take a very individualized approach to healing, recognizing that every person is unique and changing. They recognize the stagnation that causes depression can have numerous causes and the way it affects each person can vary. Qi stagnation mainly affecting the liver can cause strong feelings of anger and irritability. People with more anxiety and insomnia may have qi stagnation patterns affecting the heart or spleen. Chronic cases of depression are often related to a deficiency of yin: the cooling, calming, restorative energy of the body.

Acupuncture is just one of the tools TCM practitioners use to help correct qi flow. It has been shown to be a safe and effective alternative to antidepressant medications. In one study, patients felt an improvement in their mood and quality of life after only a few weeks of acupuncture treatment, whereas patients on antidepressants took longer to experience similar benefits.[8]

Recently, several studies suggested that acupuncture may promote neurogenesis.[9] This can explain one mechanism for acupuncture's ability to treat depression and give lasting benefits. Also, Chinese herbal formulas have dramatically fewer side effects than pharmaceuticals, and their safety and effectiveness is also supported by scientific research.[10]

Holistic practitioners also offer diet and lifestyle guidance to address the triggers and resulting imbalance that sets the stage for depression. Lasting healing requires a multi-dimensional approach and with increasing access to this type of guidance and the right tools, such as acupuncture and herbal therapies, we can look forward to a happier, healthier population.

**If you or someone you know is suffering from depression, get help today and be sure to incorporate acupuncture into your healing journey to stimulate neurogenesis and boost your body, mind and spirit!**


[1] https://www.technologynetworks.com/neuroscience/articles/a-popular-theory-of-depression-wasnt-debunked-by-a-new-review-it-got-debunked-years-ago-363986

[2] https://www.webmd.com/depression/what-to-know-about-acupuncture-for-depression

[3] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicide_in_the_United_States

[4] https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/what-causes-depression

[5] https://www.drugs.com/medical-answers/common-side-effects-antidepressants-3440087

[6] https://www.drugs.com/medical-answers/common-side-effects-antidepressants-3440087

[7] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19758520

[8] https://europepmc.org/article/med/10758845/reload=0

[9] https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24215918

[10] https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fphar.2020.00586/full



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