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## Releasing Stress for a Healthy New Year

The start of the new year is a time of looking forward to the future, setting goals and putting in motion the steps necessary to achieve them. Moving directly from a busy season immediately to actively working towards achieving goals can create additional stress and pressure to do well. Unchecked stress is often the cause of illness and deterioration of health. Finding a release valve for your stress can help you stay healthy. Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of acupuncture in treating stress, anxiety and lowering blood pressure. Together, acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help achieve the changes you seek as they assist in illness prevention, stress relief, minimizing aches and pains, improving energy and finding balance.



As a normal part of life, stress enables us to get things done. Left unmanaged, however, stress can lead to emotional, psychological, and even physical problems. Stress causes a disruption in the flow of vital energy, or Qi, through the body. This can throw off the immune system and cause new symptoms or aggravate already troublesome health conditions and, over time, more serious illnesses can develop.

Stressful situations that last over a long period of time can create an ongoing low-level stress that puts continual pressure on the nervous system and can cause the overproduction of stress hormones such as cortisol. The extra stress hormones sustained over an extended period of time may wear out the body's reserves, leading to fatigue, depression, a weakened immune system, and a host of serious physical and psychological ailments.

According to Oriental medicine, stress, frustration and unresolved anger can play an important part in throwing the immune system off and allowing pathogens to affect the body. Through acupuncture, these energy blockages can be addressed. Acupuncture points can help energy flow smoothly and alleviate not only the symptoms of stress and anxiety, but the stress and anxiety itself. Acupuncture improves circulation of blood throughout the body, which oxygenates the tissues and cycles out stress hormones like cortisol and other waste chemicals. The calming nature of acupuncture also decreases heart rate, lowers blood pressure and relaxes the muscles.

In addition to acupuncture, Oriental medicine offers a wide range of tools and techniques that can be integrated into your wellness plan to keep stress in check. These tools include Tui Na, Qi Gong exercises, dietary therapy, meditations and acupressure that you can administer at home. Seasonal acupuncture treatments serve to nurture and nourish your kidney Qi, which can greatly enhance the body's ability to thrive in times of stress and aid in healing, preventing illness and increasing vitality.

While it isn't always possible to remove the external forces causing stress, the ability to effectively deal with stress is a choice. Take time for yourself to cultivate the energy you need to handle your stress more skillfully and effectively.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing stress or a related disorder, contact us for more information about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can help you regain peace of mind and stay healthy!**

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## Finding Emotional Balance

At some point in life everyone deals with major upheavals or emotional distress. These events can trigger a host of unexpected feelings and behaviors, from depression and panic attacks to major disruptions in sleep and eating. Acupuncture and Oriental medicine can alleviate symptoms associated with mental and emotional health issues by treating the root cause of the problem to help restore balance to the body's internal environment.

Mental health disorders are medical conditions that can disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood and ability to cope with the daily demands of life or relate well to others. Affecting people of any age, race, religion, or income, mental health issues are more common than you might think. In fact, experts estimate that a significant number of people report symptoms that indicate sufficient qualifying criteria of a mental disorder. Some mental disorders are less severe and can be easily managed with proper treatment. Other mental illnesses are more serious and require more extensive treatment, including major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and borderline personality disorder.

From an Oriental medicine perspective, mental health disorders can cause a disruption in the flow of vital energy, or Qi, through the body. These energetic imbalances can throw off the immune system or cause pain, sleep disturbances, abnormal digestion, headaches, menstrual irregularities and, over time, more serious illnesses. Acupuncture treatments can correct these imbalances and directly affect the way your body manages your mental health.

Oriental medicine does not recognize any mental disorder as one particular syndrome. Instead, it aims to treat the specific symptoms that are unique to each individual, using a variety of techniques including acupuncture, lifestyle changes, dietary recommendations and exercises to restore imbalances found in the body. Therefore, if 100 patients are treated with acupuncture and Oriental medicine for anxiety, each of those 100 people will receive a unique, customized treatment.

Mental health issues are best managed when health professionals work together to meet the unique needs of each individual. Acupuncture is an excellent addition to any treatment plan as it is used to help the body restore balance, treating the root of the disorder, while also diminishing symptoms.

Acupuncture and Oriental medicine practitioners have the ability to detect energetic changes that occur in the body and relieve symptoms by restoring equilibrium. The physical and emotional symptoms that you are experiencing will help create a clear picture for your practitioner, from which a treatment plan can be created specifically for you.

**If you or someone you know struggles with a mental health disorder, or if you would like to know how to optimize your mental health, please call to find out more about how acupuncture and Oriental medicine can be integrated into your mental and emotional wellness plan today!**

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## Walk Your Way to Relief

Taking a brisk walk boosts endorphins, which can reduce stress hormones and alleviate mild depression.

Walking also promotes health and wellness by putting gentle pressure on an acupuncture point on the sole of the foot known as *Yongquan* (Bubbling Spring).

This point is the start of the Kidney meridian. Stimulation of this energizing point can stabilize emotions and promote clarity of the mind, helping you to focus on your goals.

### How To Stimulate *Yongquan*

#### While Walking:

Let your heel tap the ground gently and feel your weight transfer fully to the ball and toes of your foot. Focus on breathing into your lower abdomen. Keep your shoulders relaxed and allow your arms to swing freely.

#### By Tapping:

Use your fists to strike your *Yongquan* about 100 times on each foot.

#### By Rolling:

Gently roll a tennis ball under your foot while relaxing on the couch



## Practice Mindfulness

Being mindful is to focus awareness on the present moment, acknowledging and accepting what you are feeling and thinking.

Mindfulness enables us to let go of tension, increases our ability to form connections with others and deal with unexpected events.

Increasing mindfulness has many benefits, including improved mental well-being, including improved control of emotions and moods. It reduces stress, anxiety and other destructive emotions.

A small study published in JAMA Internal Medicine in 2015 showed that mindfulness meditation also improves sleep quality and helps fight insomnia

A variety of techniques can be used to cultivate mindfulness including tai chi and meditation.

The word "meditation" comes from a Greek word that means "to be mindful." Regular meditation creates a continuing sense of well-being, leaving us feeling confident and calm.

*Source: Black DS, O'Reilly GA, Olmstead R, Breen EC, Irwin MR. Mindfulness Meditation and Improvement in Sleep Quality and Daytime Impairment Among Older Adults With Sleep Disturbances A Randomized Clinical Trial. JAMA Intern Med. 2015;175(4):494-501. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.8081*