

Chinese Medicine and Mental Health

By [Jennifer Dubowsky](#), www.tcm007.com / August 30, 2014



[Mental health disorders](#) are more common than you think. According to the NIH (National Institutes of Health), about one in four adults suffer from a mental disorder every year.

Mental health disorders are medical conditions that take many forms and affect people to varying degrees. Mental disorders can cause disturbed thinking, an inability to cope with daily tasks, impaired work performance, feelings of worthlessness, delusions, mood swings, a compromised immune system, insomnia, fatigue and difficulty relating to others. Whether it is a serious mental illness or a mild, temporary state, acupuncture is an excellent, safe addition to almost any treatment plan. This is an area where Chinese Medicine shines because it treats the whole person – mental and physical – at the same time. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the two are not seen as separate entities as they are in Western medicine.

In my book, [Adventures in Chinese Medicine: Acupuncture, Herbs and Ancient Ideas For Today](#), I write about the philosophical differences between Eastern and Western Medicine. Here is a short excerpt:

'Western medicine depends heavily on science, with its ideological roots in Greece and Egypt. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), the famous French philosopher and one of the fathers of modern science and mathematics, greatly influenced the formation of the scientific method. As a scientist, in order to get bodies to dissect, he made a deal with the Pope that medicine would confine itself to the body. People's emotions and souls would be the province of the Church.

This overly simplistic explanation points out the evolution of Western medicine's creation of a separation of mind and body, viewing the body as a complex system of biological parts, rather than a holistic unit. Certainly Western medicine has accomplished amazing things, but it is not the only path to wellness.'

Chinese Medicine, including treatments of acupuncture and herbal medicine, can alleviate many of the unpleasant symptoms associated with mental health issues and the side effects related to prescription medications. In TCM, mental health disorders are seen as a disturbance in the flow of Qi. Think of it like an energetic imbalance. This imbalance can lead to many problems, both physical and emotional. The aim in Chinese Medicine is to treat the unique individuals and their specific symptoms in order to improve their overall well-being. This is why patients with the same Western diagnosis will be treated with different acupuncture points as well as different lifestyle and dietary recommendations.

From a Western perspective, this is how acupuncture helps:

1. Acupuncture raises the level of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins are chemicals naturally produced in the brain to fight pain. They can also positively affect your mood.
2. Acupuncture can lower blood pressure, induce relaxation, increase circulation, decrease anxiety and treat sleeplessness to help patients better regulate their emotions and responses to stress.
3. [Acupuncture can help regulate serotonin](#), a chemical in the brain that affects a person's emotional state.

In short, Chinese Medicine is just what the doctor ordered (even if they didn't). TCM has mental health benefits.

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