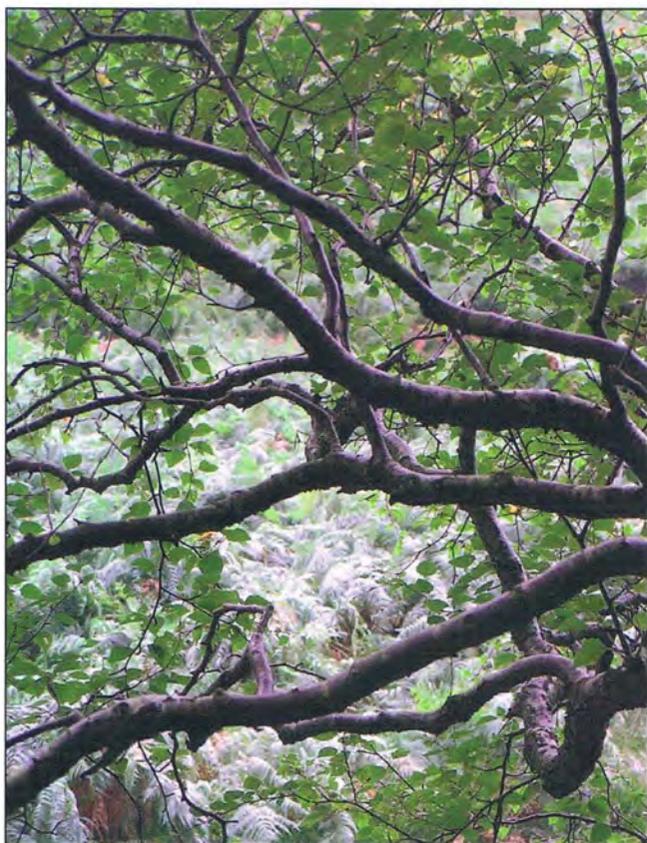


Pointers.

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Cycles of life

by Tania Largent

With the arrival of spring we see a blossoming of new life, an awakening after the quiet of winter. Spring is the beginning of a new cycle, a seasonal cycle within which we see reflected aspects of our birth, growth and development. The seasons are similarly reflected in our daily cycle — we awaken in the morning as new blossoms in spring, our activities gather momentum towards the summer noon and the autumn afternoon then wanes into the quiet of the winter evening time. The waxing and waning of our daily energy reminds us the waxing and waning of the lunar cycle, another cycle of impact on our lives, especially in the lives of women.

Within the framework of Oriental medicine one often hears the terms yin and yang. Yin corresponds to the female energy of receptivity and to the quiet energy of winter, a time of potential that we see burst forth in the spring. The new moon is considered a yin time and corresponds to ovulation, the most receptive time of the month when conception is possible. Yang corresponds to the dynamic energy of summer, a time full of activity and an energy similar to that felt during the full moon. At this time energy has gathered internally as well as externally and when this energy flows appropriately so the menstrual blood will flow without incidence. However, with the gathering of so much energy there is the possibility of inappropriate movement that results in many of the menstrual

problems that we now consider to be a normal part our monthly cycle. Just because it has become the norm does not mean that it is a normal or healthy way to be.

A healthy menstrual cycle is approx 28 ± 4 days (including 5 days menstruation). A normal period is not too heavy/not too light, painless with no clots, begins clearly, heavier for the first day or so, and then wanes to end clearly. Only observation of the lunar cycle should indicate the arrival of one's period, not the various signs and symptoms now considered as premenstrual syndrome (PMS). These are an indication of imbalance at some level within the body. Early, delayed or irregular cycles are similarly a sign of imbalance.

Oriental medicine — using a combination of acupuncture, herbs and shiatsu — can easily address these imbalances. It often takes around three menstrual cycles to set right but progress is noticeable during this time, particularly through the sympto-thermal charts used to monitor basal body temperature changes together with all other signs and symptoms that arise during the month.

There are many reasons why the menstrual cycle may not progress appropriately. We live such fast-paced lives, constantly being called to action, weighed down by expectations (those we have of ourselves coupled with those we believe others have of us) and our emotions get pushed into overdrive so we feel constantly stressed. All these discordant forces

affect the harmonious flow of qi and so in clinic one often diagnoses the stagnation of the Liver qi as a contributing factor lurking beneath many menstrual irregularities.

Oriental medicine sees the body, mind and emotions as an integrated whole. Our thoughts and feelings interact directly on our internal organs and the state of our body directly affects our thoughts and feelings. Each emotion that we experience has a specific impact on the nature of the energy within us, and as the Liver is responsible for the free flow of qi it is bound to be affected by our emotional state and thus affect our physical wellbeing. Premenstrual syndrome is a classic expression of the lack of free flow within, and the manifestation that causes the most problems for many women are mood swings, either irritability or teariness, as this impacts on those around them.

Shiatsu and acupuncture are wonderful ways to restore the natural flow of qi by nourishing and stimulating both meridians and specific points along these. Whichever modality is chosen the focus would be on the Liver and Gall Bladder meridians. Whether using acupressure or acupuncture the source points on the wood channels, LV3 and GB40, can be used to nourish and restore the harmonious flow of qi. For a bit of extra drive GB41 (the wood point on the wood channel) and LV14 (the Liver mu point) can shift even the most stuck qi. If devil woman enters your clinic, sedating LV2 and GB38 (the fire points) can

quench the raging fires. If a puddle of tears sits before you, nourishing GB15, DU20 or Si Shen Cong (the 4 Angels located 1 cun anterior, posterior and lateral to DU20) can lift low moods back into balance.

Once a treatment has reintroduced your client to balance and harmony and they then return to the life they have created, most of your good work will be quickly undone due to old habits and lifestyles. This is where Chinese herbs can keep the momentum of a treatment going until the client learns to create harmony within their lives that matches their new inner harmony.

A classic formula for general mild PMS is Xiao Yao San (or Jia Wei Xiao Yao San for fiery devil woman) as this formula regulates Liver qi, nourishes the blood, strengthens the Spleen and harmonises Liver and Spleen.

For a stronger more moving formula, Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan is great to soften and spread the Liver qi, quicken the blood, and harmonise the Liver and Spleen. It may need to be combined with An Shen Bu Xin Wan to address the emotional components of PMS as this latter formula subdues the yang, calms the hun and shen, supplements yin and blood, regulates qi and quickens the blood.

Case study

A client came to my clinic suffering from premenstrual migraines with nausea, breast tenderness, bloating and backache. Her mood swings were extreme and angry outbursts were threatening her new relationship. She had a slightly long cycle (around 33 days) with a dragging sensation on day 1 of bleeding and much clotting. She also had a general tendency to constipation and insomnia. Her Spleen pulse was weak, her Liver pulse wiry and her tongue was pale.

It seemed that her Liver qi was becoming stagnant as there just wasn't enough qi or blood to keep things moving. She was slightly needle-phobic so we agreed on an alternating course of shiatsu and acupuncture with herbs prescribed all month. In the first half of her cycle we used shiatsu to nourish together with a formula called Ren Shen Yang Rong Tang to nourish her Heart blood and Spleen Qi. In the second half of her cycle we used acupuncture to nourish and strongly move the qi (some points used included GB41 to move the qi, LV3 to nourish the Liver qi and LV8 to nourish the liver blood, LV13 to harmonise the Liver/Spleen disharmony and ease the nausea and other points as appropriate) together with taking a modified Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan.

After treatment her first period had less clotting, cramping and heaviness and she didn't feel so drained after bleeding. Her second period came without the migraines, with minimal cramping and the dragging sensation was missing. Over time she has reduced her treatments to fortnightly when life was stressful and monthly when all was well. She continues to take Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan in the week leading up to her period just to be sure her devilish shadow remains under control.

Once the menstrual cycle is regulated many other cycles of life fall into place more easily, including fertility or natural contraception. Oriental medicine then supports women through the various stages of pregnancy and is beneficial for postnatal support, as well as nurturing the healthy growth and development of babies and children.

Further to the monthly cycle,

Oriental medicine recognises a larger cycle within women's lives, known as the cycle of seven.

According to this cycle a woman should begin her menstrual cycle around 14 years, and complete her cycle and enter menopause, around 49 years of age. Precocious, or early onset of puberty, or delayed puberty can be addressed with acupuncture and herbs, as can many of the discomforts that arise on entering menopause.

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