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*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.* Benjamin Franklin

## Notes from My Desk: Understanding Chinese Herbs

Sometimes, in my practice, it becomes necessary to prescribe Chinese herbs. This facilitates the acupuncture treatments in bringing the body to homeostasis. There is a misconception that you can get these herbs over the counter. The reality is that I have to prescribe the herbs and sometimes come up with custom prescriptions to target the body's delicate balance most effectively. It takes years of study to learn about more than 200 individual herbs and then learn how they fit together to create formulas for complex health problems, such as hormone, neurotransmitter and nervous system imbalances.

Chinese herbal formulas are thousands of years old and have stood the test of time. What's unique about them is that there are many different herbs that work together to make the formula balanced, thus decreasing the risk of side effects. This is very different from Western pharmaceutical companies, which aim to find the active ingredient of an herb and synthesize it in a lab, bringing with it an ad nauseam list of side effects (no pun intended).

Thermal influence is an overlooked paradigm in Western pharmacology. In Eastern pharmacology, each herb has a property of being cold, cool, neutral, warm and hot. This is important knowledge since this determines how the body needs to become balanced. If the body is too hot, i.e. fevers, hot flashes, and reckless bleeding, then the body needs cooling herbs. If the body is too cold, i.e. hypothyroidism, chronic diarrhea, and certain types of infertility, then the body needs warming medicinals. Western drugs carry "arbitrary" side effects, meaning that it is not certain who is going

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to get them. From a Chinese medical standpoint, I can tell who is going to get the drug's side effects based on the person's constitution and current symptoms.

Another benefit of taking Chinese herbs is that since it is establishing homeostasis, it is basically getting to the root of the problem. It allows the body to eventually regulate functions on its own so that it is not lifetime-dependent on a substance for physiological support. It is the equivalent of eating unrefined, whole foods to "exercise" the body's function, vs. giving it a refined version that goes through the system too quickly slowing down or stopping the body's ability to function on its own.

The length of time required to take herbs is dependent on the chronicity and severity of the disorder. That is why it is imperative to be treated as soon as possible for mild cases of insomnia, digestive upset and menstrual irregularities before they become further issues. Herbs can be given to children at smaller doses in liquid extracts. Children respond the quickest to treatment. The best gift you can give a female adolescent is a regulated menstrual cycle through the use of acupuncture and herbs as opposed to years of birth control symptom masking that may lead to infertility complications later on.

The benefits of acupuncture and Chinese herbs are far-reaching and profound. Let the wisdom of this ancient medicine work with you so that you can achieve optimal health.