

## Feeling Cold? Don't sneeze at Qi!

WELL & GOOD

Wade James

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Not all feelings of cold mean you have a cold condition, such as the winter variety.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), cold hands and feet are usually the result of lifestyle factors including stress, overwork and emotional constraint.

Add a lack of exercise and irregular diet and a pattern of energy (Qi) stagnation develops. When Qi does not flow freely through the acupuncture channels, a person feels lethargic, but better with exercise, their appetite is erratic, bowels are irregular and they will be moody without that sense of joie de vivre.

Before long this pattern of Qi stagnation will cause your Qi to implode towards the upper abdomen, resulting in discomfort or pain along with bloating and a sense of fullness in the belly. Women may also have the added burden of an irregular menstrual cycle.

The lack of free flow of Qi and the implosion to the middle leads to poor circulation of the extremities, resulting in cold hands and feet. This is a very common condition.

Once established, this pattern of Qi stagnation will be set off by emotional upsets, workplace stress and inadequate exercise. Cold hands and feet then become the norm for that person. The other clinical features of abdominal pain, bloating, and a sense of frustration or outbursts of inappropriate emotions may also become 'normal'.

Many products on the market are aimed at improving circulation. Chinese ginseng (Ren Shen) or American ginseng (Xi Yang Shen) are not recommended when energy stagnation is prominent.

You may feel good for a day or so but then the invigorating effects of the ginsengs will cause the stagnation to be worse as the increased energy generated by the ginseng is constrained by the general pattern of stagnation. In a few days your cold hands and feet will feel worse, your emotions will be even more constrained and you will feel unable to move forward in your life.

This type of pattern of disharmony requires the person to make lifestyle changes. Regular exercise and regular hours are a good start. Strategies to alleviate stress and emotional constraint are essential.

The first chapter of the 2000-year-old book The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine (Huang Di Nei Jing) poses a question from the Yellow Emperor to the famous Doctor Qi Bo. He asks Qi Bo why people of ancient times lived well past 100 years. Qi Bo answered that they ate a balanced diet at regular times, arose and retired at regular times, avoided overstressing their bodies or minds and refrained from overindulgence of all kinds. And they practised exercises that combined stretching and breathing.

So the answer to this type of cold hands and feet is moderation in all things, combined with regular exercise and life activities that relieve everyday stresses. When your Qi flows freely, your hands and feet will feel comfortably warm, abdominal discomforts will diminish and your emotions will be free and easy. For stubborn cases, acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine may be appropriate.

Wade James

Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner, Chinawest

Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association (WA) chair