

Change in the Weather
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The Chinese have always paid great attention to change. One of the oldest and maybe the most famous of Chinese books, the *I Ching*, is an oracle of change. Change is fundamental to the concepts of Yin & Yang which permeate Chinese culture and thought. In Chinese Medicine, the changing of the seasons and the weather as it is conceptualized in “Five Element Theory” is an especially important time for promoting health and preventing disease.

According to Chinese medicine and the holistic, Taoist philosophical concepts that inform it, when the weather changes, we as part of the natural “whole” must also make changes in order to remain in harmony with that whole. We change our activities, the foods we eat, our clothing, even our thoughts and prayers. This is crystal clear to someone who lives a nature-based life – say, a traditional farmer, or a Taoist monk – but in our modern world with all of its insulating comforts and non-natural influences, the benefits of changing with the seasons seem less obvious.

You’ve noticed that people tend to get sick when the seasons change, or when there is an “unseasonable” change in the weather. In the clinic we see this very clearly. A change in the weather is good for business, so to speak.

Also notice that you don’t see many references to meteorological phenomena in the long list of western biomedical diseases with the notable exception of our common name for that most commonplace of conditions – the one that often shows up when the weather changes, the cold. But in Chinese medicine you do!

Generally, if you ask your Chinese medical practitioner/acupuncturist what her diagnosis of your condition is, she’ll utter something that sounds a lot like a weather report: “Damp Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder” or “Wind-Dryness affecting the Lung.” This is simply a reflection of one of the most basic differences between biomedicine and Chinese Medicine. biomedicine looks through its reductionist microscope to the pathogen and/or the disease state at the biochemical level. For example, it sees that tiny, yet very pesky bit of RNA, the “cold” virus, as the cause of the condition, and of course, on its own terms, biomedicine is absolutely right. The problem with this approach is that when using such hermetic laboratory conditions and high magnification, biomedicine has trouble seeing the bigger picture, like the weather. Chinese Medicine is naive about RNA and viruses and even the formal existence of a nervous or endocrine system, but it is very much concerned with natural phenomena – that is, the weather conditions both outside and inside the patient. This is why your acupuncturist gives you a weather report (if you ask). That little virus affects different people very differently depending upon their weather patterns.

I recently caught my five-year-old daughter’s cold. In her it should have been called a “hot.” She presented with all “heat” signs and symptoms: fever, head-ache, red eyes, sore

throat, swollen glands and yellow snot. When I caught it I came down with chills, cold extremities, stiff neck, a frog in my throat and clear, copious nasal discharge (adult snot). Mine were all “cold” symptoms. It was the same virus and, therefore, the same condition from a biomedical standpoint, but according to Chinese Medicine my daughter and I had different disharmonies! Why? Because, constitutionally, she runs hot, and I tend to be “Yang deficient” and therefore on the cold side. The names for our two patterns in Chinese Medicine are Wind-Heat and Wind-Cold, respectively. And there are other possible patterns that arise in folks who catch a cold. My daughter and I took different herbal formulas. Hers was a cooling diaphoretic formula, while mine was a warming one. If she were ready for acupuncture (She says, “Not quite!”), we would have received slightly different acupuncture treatments. We both recovered quickly, but had we made a few wise adjustments as the weather shifted to cold and blustery, there is a good chance we could have avoided our colds altogether.

In China, when the seasons or the weather change, millions of people make changes of their own before their health becomes compromised. They re-balance before the scales tip toward *dis-ease*. Some of the ways in which this shift is achieved are: dietary change, the addition of a balancing or tonifying herbal formula, a constitutional acupuncture treatment to fortify vulnerable organ systems, an adjustment in one’s therapeutic exercise (Qi Gong) program.

If you would like to find out about how to change your weather and live more in harmony with the seasons, call your local practitioner of Chinese Medicine! And whether you are Chinese or not, your mother was right (and practicing Chinese Medicine) when the weather changed and she told you to cover up your neck or you’d catch a cold. But that’s a whole ‘nother story.

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