

The Yin and the Yang of it

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Photo: BenTaiChi

Tai Chi Chuan is an internal Chinese martial art that strengthens and rebalances the Yin-Yang energies of the body, promoting good health and longevity.

Last month we discussed how an imbalance within the energetic system of the body leads to illness, and how acupuncture and herbal therapy heals by re-balancing the energies within this system. The “energy-balance” we were referring to is the balance of Yin and Yang.

According to the Yin-Yang theory, everything consists of two opposite aspects, Yin and Yang. These two aspects are represented in: up and down, left and right, hot and cold, stillness and movement, etc. Since they are opposites, there is implied conflict between the two, and yet they are completely interdependent. When one rises the other falls. When darkness creeps in, the light fades at the same rate. There cannot be total darkness and bright light at the same time.

Yang characteristics include movement, ascending, brightness, hyperactivity and heat. Functional and progressing diseases pertain to Yang. Yin characteristics, in contrast, include stillness, descending, darkness, hypo activity and cold. Typical disease patterns associated with an imbalance of Yin energy include organic and degenerative diseases.

Because of the Yin-Yang interdependency, they constantly interact with each other, creating a continually fluctuating balance. When Yin lessens, Yang increases, and vice versa. When you are in good health, the interactions between these two energies maintain a relative balance where neither is too strong nor too weak.

Trouble arises when there is either an excess or deficiency of either Yin or Yang. This is when illness begins to rear its ugly head, and suddenly you feel “off.” The longer this imbalance remains untreated, the worse it gets, until finally you end up manifesting some form of acute illness, or chronic / degenerative disease.

In addition to being interdependent,

Yin and Yang are also considered “mutually transforming.” What this means is that at their extremes, they transform into the other. So, extreme cold brings about heat, and extreme heat induces cold. Interior syndromes can transform into exterior syndromes, and excess symptoms can flip into deficiencies.

This deep complexity is one of the reasons why we always recommend you visit an acupuncturist who is trained in the proper theories, diagnosis and application of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) principles. Making sure you receive treatment from someone with a minimum of a Master’s degree in Oriental Medicine may be the difference between a “so-so” experience, and a “WOW!” result.

This mutual transformation mentioned above is often seen during the development of an illness. As an example, if you suffer a high fever that suddenly drops drastically, accompanied by a pale complexion, cold arms, legs, and a weak pulse, your Yang syndrome (fever) has transformed into a Yin syndrome. The proper emergency treatment would include warming the limbs to bring the pulse back to normal, which will allow the Yang chi (energy) to recover, bringing you out of the danger zone for further internal injury. As a general, simplified principle, you treat the Yin energy when you have a Yang disease, and you treat the Yang for a Yin disease.

The theory of Yin and Yang is also applied to the clinical administration of herbs, where each herb can be categorized as having either Yin or Yang characteristics. Yin herbs have cold, cool or moist properties. Yang herbs are hot, warm or dry. Their flavors are also divided into Yin/Yang, with sour, bitter and salty being Yin, and pungent or sweet Yang. The goal of any clinical and herbal treatment is to restore a healthy Yin-Yang balance within the patient.

You can easily apply the theory of Yin-Yang in your daily life to help you maintain your internal balance. Let’s say you’ve been working on the computer for some time and beginning to feel tired and worn out. Your breathing is sluggish, eyes are heavy and your face feels like it’s about to slide off. You’re clearly having a very Yin moment. To counter this heavy, lethargic feeling—stand up, shake your arms, jump up and down and breathe deeply. If you can, stand in the sun for a few minutes. These things are all Yang-natured, to counteract and rebalance the excessive Yin you experienced before.

Here’s another example of using the Yin-Yang theory as an easy-breezy health maintenance tool at home. You ate too much! You ate to the point of being in a good amount of pain, and from the way your body feels, you may as well have eaten lead. What’s happening? Yin is having a field day in your normally Yang gut. To snap out of the distress, simply drink a cup of warm ginger tea. The ginger, being an “acidic and hot” herb, will soon push the excess Yin back, reestablishing the balance. Taking over-the-counter drugs—, which so many end up doing in a case like this—will not fix the problem. They will only mask the surface symptom, and often, not very well at that. **ATM**

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