

Ancient remedies find favor

In summer, more people turn to traditional Chinese medicine treatments to battle modern lifestyle afflictions

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The number of young people seeking traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) treatments for illnesses at hospitals in summer has been on the rise in recent years.

Chinese generally believe that TCM treatments are more effective during summer, because this is when *yangqi* — the warm element in the yin-yang balance — is at its highest and, hence, allows the body to be more responsive to treatment.

Longhua Hospital and Shuguang Hospital, both of which are affiliated to the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, reported that the number of patients in their 30s and 40s lining up to receive *sanfutie* plasters this summer grew by at least 30 percent from last year.

However, elderly citizens and children still dominate the market for these herb-coated plasters that are placed on acupoints.

These plasters are commonly used to treat ailments such as rheumatism, asthma, chronic bronchitis and allergic rhinitis. The remedy was first documented in *Zhangshi Yitong*, a book published more than 300 years ago.

TCM practitioners said that the fast pace of life in megacities such as Shanghai has also contributed to the growing popularity of *sanfutie* plasters.

They pointed out that the plaster can be used as a prevention against problems common among young white-collar workers, such as neck and shoulder pain, insomnia and gastrointestinal discomfort.

"Many white-collar workers in Shanghai have to deal with great pressure at work, get little sleep and often skip meals," said Liu Jianguo, director of the TCM department at Shanghai Ren'ai Hospital.

"This in turn affects their health in the long run."

Cai Mengsha, 30, used to suffer from frequent stomachaches and nausea, a result of years of working overtime and excessive alcohol consumption. She said her health has improved after using *sanfutie* plasters for three years.

"The treatment administered over the last few summers seems to be effective in alleviating the discomfort. Doctors say the treatment would require three years of constant application in order to be effective," said Cai, an employee at a foreign enterprise in the motor industry.

Over at Liang Gong Guan, a chain health institution that offers moxibustion therapy, TCM practitioners say 80 percent of their clients are aged between 30 and 45.

Moxibustion therapy involves burning sticks filled with dried



People wait in line to receive *sanfutie* plasters. Chinese generally believe that receiving treatment when the weather is warm will help cure illness more effectively.

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wormwood leaves close to the body to warm meridian points and stimulate the circulation of blood and *qi*.

"The rise in the number of young people seeking treatment is due to the heightened awareness of health issues today and the preference for non-drug treatments," said Xie Youming, a therapist at Liang Gong Guan. "For an acute health problem, such as neck or waist pain, results usually appear after just one or two treatments," he said.

"For chronic issues like insomnia and period cramps, patients will need to receive treatment for at least three months or longer before they feel the difference," Xie added.

The rise in popularity of moxibustion had driven 35-year-old Lu Ge to set up a company selling products related to the treatment.

He said that many people these days are performing the treatment on themselves as it is cheaper.

The most important part of the treatment is finding the right acupuncture points to warm using the moxibustion sticks. Lu said there are many books that teach people how to locate these points.

Lu has also since February been running a subscription service on a WeChat account to educate users about moxibustion. The WeChat account currently has more than 6,000 active followers. He explained that the treatment is popular because many perceive it to be a solution to many health problems related to *qi*, or life energy, that are brought about by modern lifestyle, such as staying up late, eating greasy food and being exposed to air conditioning all day.

Famous doctor much in demand

Shi Xiangdong, a doctor at the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) department of Huayang Community Hospital in Shanghai's Changning district, receives more than 12,000 patients a year.

Due to Shi's reputation, many patients travel up to two hours from remote districts to seek his treatment.

"Patients have to make an appointment with me at least three months in advance, because I simply have too many patients to handle," said the 48-year-old doctor.

Shi is always handling multiple patients. A row of timers on the wall helps him to keep track of the time left for each patient's treatment.

He starts working around 7:30 am and does not take a break until five hours later.

Mou Lili, 70, who started receiving treatment from Shi seven years ago for neck pain, said he was unlike most TCM doctors.

"Doctors will usually only work on the part of the body that experiences discomfort, but Shi applies treatment on the relevant meridian systems all over your body after checking your health situation by feeling the pulse and pressing different parts of the body to see if you feel sore," she said.

Since 2013, 24 common TCM



Shi Xiangdong (left) is popular among patients because of his expertise in acupuncture and cupping treatment. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

treatments have been used in more than 300 community hospitals in the city. Many of these treatments are used to alleviate pain.

Shi said that many patients who suffered pains because of lumbar disc protrusion were healed without the need for surgery because of acupuncture coupled with electric stimulation.

"In most cases, I'm confident a patient who cannot turn his or her head will be able to do that after acupuncture treatment and massage for 15 minutes," he said.

"Acupuncture and massage are very helpful for middle-aged and senior residents, many of whom suffer pain in the neck, shoulders,

legs and other parts of the body. When people get older, there is an increasing need for such treatments," said Shi.

He added that TCM can be effective in treating health problems that do not cause pain, such as insomnia, hair loss, hives, allergic rhinitis, myopia and even depression.

For patients suffering from insomnia, Shi uses acupuncture and a special massage technique that dates back more than a century.

The focus for the treatment of depression lies in healing the liver which affects the flow of *qi*, or life energy.

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