

# Running Water

A question often heard about Chinese medicine is: *how does it work?* With over 30 years exploring this question there is still more to learn every day. There are many and detailed explanations and intricate explanations: chi and blood: five elements (fire, earth, metal, water, wood); eight principles (yin and yang, external and internal, cold and heat, deficient and excess) and more. The history of Chinese medicine extends over 5000 years. There's been plenty of time to create theories.



A simple response to this question covers approximately 75% of situations; *running water purifies itself*. And even simpler response, though not as poetic: circulation. A large majority of conditions can be positively influenced by improving circulation.

We can easily observe the process of running water purifying itself in nature: trees fall (or beavers assist them) across a creek, stream, river. Initially there is no noticeable problems. Over time, the area downstream becomes dry and later parched; plants die' insects and animals go elsewhere. The area upstream becomes saturated then boggy, then marshy. Water stagnates. The water behind the log jam loses its natural balance creating moss, algae and non beneficial bacteria which affects the water and surrounding environment.

Removing a few trees in a log jam starts water movement - circulation. Over time, the downstream area moistens, plants recover. The area upstream becomes less stagnant allowing the environment to rebalance. The log jam doesn't have to be totally removed for these changes. There just needs to be running water.

The same process can be seen with debris, waste or pollution filling a waterway, like oil spills from tankers. In the short term these can be deadly and destructive. And, over time - sometime a very long time - as long as there is circulation, water purifies itself.

What happens in nature also happens in these human bodies, which are not separate from nature. Disease (dis-ease), stress, aging, injuries can all be seen as variations on logs jamming up a creek. Rather than water, Chinese medicine observes the flow of energy, blood, cerebrospinal fluid. And like water, circulation of these vital substances purifies itself. This is an inherent healing process within the body, mind and spirit.

After many years, decades of much effort to heal human bodies, it now seems much more simple: with supportive circulation, the body will heal itself.

A while ago I began to understand more clearly some of the teachings of older, more experienced doctors who saw thousands of patients over many decades. The human body, mind and spirit have much more sophisticated and effective healing mechanisms built in to each cell than Chinese medicine, high tech Western medicine or anything else can provide. It is a sobering and joyous

insight.

What is true for healing the physical body structure is also true for mind, emotions and the more subtle spirit. Stagnation, blockages, obstruction to flow/circulation can be a large part of emotional and spiritual imbalance. Movement, circulation - running water - is valuable here, too. Sometime it is as simple as expressing stuck emotions and having them heard to begin the natural process of balance leading to healing.

The three major modalities of Chinese medicine share this overall approach of improving circulation using different methods. Acupuncture uses needles in points along meridians (energy conduits or *creeks*) to balance flow and circulation. Herbs utilize the qualities of plants, food, to do the same thing. One of the benefits of herbs is that they can be taken daily. In a mild and gradually way, herbs can be supportive to circulation on a daily basis, not just occasional treatment sessions. Touch, massage, bodywork, is the third Chinese medicine modality. The human quality of touch - our own, another trusted person - allows the body to relax, let go, loosen held tension with resulting improved circulation.



Some individuals and some conditions respond to one of these modalities more than the others. It can also be helpful to combine techniques like, using herbs daily and having periodic acupuncture or bodywork.

The approach of improving circulation is not limited to Chinese medicine. Any healing technique could be a valuable aid. For example, antibiotics could be useful to decrease a bacterial lung infection, thus improving circulation of air, blood and energy in the chest. A side effect could be to decrease beneficial bacteria in the digestive system, impeding circulation. Understanding the value of circulation allows us to combine probiotics with the antibiotic, keeping the benefits, offsetting the side effects.



Improving circulation may also be achieved in areas other than medical treatment or taking something. Exercise is a very valuable way of improving cardio-circulation, although too much, or too strenuous exercise can lead to minor injuries, tension, strains that impede circulation.

Heat applied to an area by hot pack, or generalized by a hot tub, relaxes muscle tissue and increases blood flow. Alternating hot and cold packs can increase these benefits in a local area (5 mins. hot; 5 mins. cold; at least 2 repetitions).

Taking regular breaks from sedentary work or driving decreases the negative impact of not moving on circulation. A 5 minute break every 30-60 minutes allows the body, mind and spirit to maintain balanced circulation.

Doing activities we truly enjoy has a beneficial impact on circulation, even if it is not a cardio-workout. The key seems to be that we deeply enjoy it, not just doing it because it is good for us. Activities like gardening, golfing, dancing, walking, singing, playing music, art - all can contribute to relaxation and improved circulation. Interestingly, the same activity won't necessarily have the same benefits for everyone. Some people live to garden, others think it is torture.

Being in nature is another way to connect with relaxation and running water, air, animals, weather. For me, if there is water in the river - kayak; snow on the mountain - ski & snowshoe; in-between there is hiking the mountains & desert, digging in the garden and planting trees.

However we enjoy doing it, immersing ourselves in nature connects us with the natural circulation cycles of earth & sky & water & wind.

The detrimental effects of restricted circulation are obvious on the body, mind and spirit. In the initial minor stages they seem insignificant. Left uncared for over time, these are the minor signs and symptoms that expand into more problems and limiting disease (dis-ease). Noticing the qualities of running water, circulation, or lack of, in our lives can be useful way of supporting the inherent healing process within these amazing human bodies.

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