

SHULAN CLINIC – ACUPUNCTURE • CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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Insomnia – by Prof. Shulan Tang

There is nothing worse than a sleepless night. Make sure you have sweet dreams and peaceful nights with the help of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

What is insomnia?

Insomnia is the term used to describe interference with normal sleep patterns. Symptoms of insomnia include delays in falling asleep, waking during the night (even though you may eventually go back to sleep), or waking very early in the morning before the sleep cycle is completed.

Quite often insomnia is more a perception of sleeplessness than true disturbed sleep. This may be due to irregular sleep patterns or sleep that is so fitful that you wake up feeling out of sorts and tired.

What causes insomnia?

Everyone occasionally experiences some difficulty sleeping, and sleep patterns tend to change with age, with many older people finding they need fewer hours sleep.

TCM views insomnia as being concerned with or caused by at least one of the following.

1. Stress and depression resulting in Liver Qi stagnation. Long term Liver Qi stagnation can turn to fire. The fire rises to disturb the Heart and spirit and the person cannot relax and sleep.
2. A diet of junk food will affect the stomach and the digestive system. In the earliest TCM book Huang Di Nei Jing, it is said 'If the stomach is not settled then a person can not sleep peacefully'.
3. A weak body constitution or long-term chronic illness both resulting in a deficiency of Kidney Yin. The water of the Kidney cannot rise up to nourish the Heart Fire. The heart Fire increases to disturb the spirit and affect the sleep.
4. Over thinking or over work impairs the Heart and Spleen; dysfunction of the Heart then causes a Blood deficiency. The Blood cannot nourish the brain and there can be Spleen deficiency, and what is known as deficiency of the Heart Blood. Food becomes hard to digest and a lack of nutrients results, in turn failing to nourish the heart.



*Chinese Herb – Bai Tou Weng
(Pulsatilla chinensis)*

Women sometimes experience this condition after labour and elderly people can be prone to it. Insomnia often only lasts a few days or weeks. Long-term insomnia can go on indefinitely unless the cause can be identified and treated.

How is insomnia treated?

Sleeping pills are a temporary solution only and can be habit forming. There is a wide range of Chinese herbal remedies to treat insomnia.

If stress or depression causes the insomnia, *Xiao Yao Wan* and *Zhen Zhu Feng* can be chosen.

If the insomnia is caused by indigestion, *Bao He Wan* and *Jian Pi Wan* can be used.

If the insomnia is caused by Kidney Yin deficiency, *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* and *Suan Zao Ren Wan* can be chosen.

If the insomnia is caused by deficiency of Qi and Blood of the Spleen and Heart, *Gui Pi Wan* and *An Shen Bu Nao Ye* can be selected.

As a diet to help insomnia you can use Lian Zi, Yu Zhu and Dan Shen to boil it as a soup and take it once a day.

Acupuncture is often used in the treatment of insomnia. Common points are Nei Guan, Shen Men and Bai Hui. A combination of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can work even better.