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Natural help for knee problems

Many of us have experienced knee pain at some point in our lives. Whether it's due to an injury, or long-term wear and tear, it can put a serious wrench in our plans, and can affect our ability to function day to day.

The knee is one of the joints in the body that is most prone to injury. It has many interconnected components, and is actually quite unstable. So when the knee is hit, fallen on, twisted, overused, or if the body's alignment is off, it can set us up for a long and painful recovery time. Knee pain may be acute or chronic, and may be caused by a traumatic injury, or by a longer-term overuse or repetitive strain pattern. It also commonly associated with arthritis, whether osteo or rheumatoid.

There are many causes and manifestations of knee problems, and I see a lot of them in my Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Acupuncture clinic. Acupuncture can be extremely effective in treating knee problems of all sorts, and can speed recovery after surgery. Acupuncture involves the insertion of extremely fine, sterile needles into specific acu-points along the meridians (energy lines), both around the painful knee, and at other distal and supportive points throughout the body. It increases the flow of *Qi* (bioenergy) and blood to the area, stimulating healing, loosening tight muscles, and carrying away waste products. In TCM, all pain is caused by stagnation or blockage, and increasing the flow results in much shorter healing times, a decrease in pain, and an increase in function.

As TCM is a holistic system that treats the whole person, (it's not just a knee!) each client is given a thorough diagnosis, including a series of questions regarding their physical and emotional functions, as well as a pulse and tongue diagnosis. This helps determine weaknesses, blockages or imbalances in the system that need to be addressed to bring balance to the body. For example, is there heat or cold? Dryness or dampness? Is there insomnia? Fatigue? Stress? Are there other areas of pain in the body? All this will determine how the client is treated. Ten clients with knee pain will be treated 10 different ways, according to their diagnosis.

In Chinese Medicine, the joints are supported and nourished by the Kidney and the Liver systems. (In TCM, we are referring not just to the organs themselves, but also to their energetic functions.) The Kidney system is the base of our body's energy, and rules the bones. It is responsible specifically for supporting the knees and lower back. (For this reason, I frequently see these two issues together, often associated with issues of fatigue and burn-out.) The Liver system nourishes the tendons and ligaments, keeping our joints (as well as our mind!) supple and flexible. With joint issues, I always choose acupuncture points to support these two systems, to bring healing not just to the painful area, but to the whole body.

Many of my clients have been pleased to find that not only has their knee pain improved with acupuncture, but they feel better overall. Because TCM works on the whole body, seemingly unrelated issues tend to resolve. "Not only is my knee pain better, but my digestion has improved too! I feel happier and more energetic, and actually feel like exercising! I'm already losing weight, which will help my knees even more!" Yes, everything is connected!

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