

INTRODUCTION

It is not weakness. It is a depleted system.

If you have been running on emergency reserves for months, if rest no longer restores you, and if your body has started speaking while your mind tries to stay silent, you are not alone. Chronic exhaustion is one of the conditions most frequently addressed through Chinese medicine, particularly among high-performing professionals.

Chinese medicine asks a different question to conventional medicine: *which internal resources have been depleted, and how are they restored?* The two approaches are complementary, not mutually exclusive. This guide gives you conceptual and practical tools to understand what may be happening in your body from a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) perspective, and the first steps you can take today. It does not replace consultation with your doctor.

CHAPTER 1

How Chinese medicine sees exhaustion.

For Chinese medicine, the body is a dynamic system of energy, fluids and vital substances that, under chronic pressure, deplete layer by layer. Exhaustion has a name, a mechanism, and a path back within this framework.

Qi: functional energy

Qi is the energy that drives everything: digestion, sleep, concentration, emotional response. When the Qi of the Spleen (digestive) and Kidney (constitutional) depletes, fatigue, brain fog and loss of motivation may appear. This is not ordinary tiredness. It is the body signalling that its foundational resources need attention.

Heart Blood: the substrate of thought

Blood in TCM is not only circulating blood. It is the fluid that nourishes the mind (Shen) and allows it to be present, clear and calm. Chronic pressure, screen overuse and poor sleep can progressively deplete it. The result may include anxiety, difficulty concentrating and interrupted sleep.

Kidney Yin: the deepest reserves

Kidney Jing and Yin represent the body's constitutional reserves. Sustained high-intensity stress can eventually affect this level. When Yin is compromised, internal heat, very fragmented sleep and progressively longer recovery times may arise.

"Sustained high performance depletes the body's deepest resources over time. Chinese medicine offers a map to understand that process and a path to reverse it."

CHAPTER 2

The 5 signs your body is asking for attention.

Chinese medicine reads the body as a map. These five patterns are the most common in chronic exhaustion. Recognising them is the first step.

1. You cannot switch off

Your mind stays active when your body is already in bed. Worries loop without stopping. You wake at 3 or 4am. In TCM, this may point to a disturbed Heart and insufficient Kidney Yin to anchor the Shen.

2. Your energy has a ceiling

Mid-morning or 3pm crashes. Caffeine dependence. The feeling that you used to have reserves and now you barely get through. The Spleen and Stomach Qi may not be generating sufficient energy from food.

3. The body is paying a price

Neck and shoulder tension that does not yield. Recurrent headaches. Digestion that is irregular or stress-sensitive. The autonomic nervous system may have been in sympathetic mode for too long.

4. Recovery takes longer

A hard week used to pass. Now a difficult week leaves a trace for days. The body loses its bounce back capacity. In TCM, this signals that defensive Qi and Blood have little margin remaining.

5. Performance is beginning to change

Reduced concentration. Less creativity. Increased emotional reactivity. Things that once came easily now require greater effort. The Shen may not have enough substrate to function with its usual clarity.

CHAPTER 3

How Chinese medicine approaches exhaustion.

Chinese medicine seeks to address the underlying pattern of imbalance, offering a complementary perspective alongside conventional treatment. It is not an alternative approach: it is an additional one.

Acupuncture: supporting the nervous system

In research settings, acupuncture has shown effects on physiological markers such as heart rate variability and muscle tension. Individual results vary. Specific points are selected to calm the Heart, nourish the Yin and support communication between organs according to the patient's pattern.

Classical herbal medicine: support between sessions

Classical Chinese herbal formulas, selected according to your specific TCM pattern, can act continuously between sessions. This is what distinguishes a treatment plan from isolated sessions. Formulas are adapted and reviewed as your condition evolves.

Auriculotherapy: accessing the nervous system

The ear contains a microsystem that allows stimulation of points associated with the autonomic nervous system. It may be particularly useful as support for anxiety and sleep disorders.

Moxibustion: supporting constitutional reserves

Thermal stimulation of specific points tonifies Kidney Yang, the root of constitutional energy in TCM. It is used when exhaustion has reached a deeper level.

Nutritional and lifestyle guidance

TCM offers personalised therapeutic guidance on nutrition, sleep structure and type of movement, adapted to each person's specific pattern. This guidance is an integral part of the treatment plan, not an optional add-on.

CHAPTER 4

7 things you can do today from a TCM perspective.

These recommendations do not replace professional treatment, but they are consistent with Chinese medicine principles and may be a useful first step. When in doubt, consult your doctor.

1. Eat breakfast before 9am and make it warm

The Stomach-Spleen window (7-9am) is considered the optimal time to replenish digestive Qi in TCM. A warm, nourishing breakfast (cooked oats, eggs, miso soup) may support Qi and Blood production more effectively than black coffee or a cold smoothie.

2. Be asleep before 11pm

TCM considers the sleep period between 11pm and 1am to be particularly relevant for the body's regeneration. Going to bed before 11pm is one of the standard recommendations in the treatment of exhaustion.

3. Reduce raw and cold foods

For compromised Spleen Qi, raw and cold foods may consume extra digestive energy. Favour gentle cooking: soups, stews and well-cooked grains.

4. Practise diaphragmatic breathing for 5 minutes daily

Deep, slow, abdominal breathing is an accessible tool with a relatively rapid effect in supporting nervous system regulation. It directly activates the vagus nerve and supports regulation of the HPA axis.

5. Avoid very intense exercise while you recover

High-intensity exercise may consume Yin and Qi rather than restoring them when the body is depleted. Gentle yoga, tai chi, walking and calm swimming are generally more appropriate in this phase.

6. Create an end-of-day ritual

The Shen needs a transition between high-demand mode and sleep. Ten minutes without screens, dim light, a herbal tea and some breathing. This is a therapeutic practice, not simply a wellness trend.

7. Choose active rest over highly stimulating leisure

Digital stimulation keeps the nervous system active even when the body is still. Real rest means reduced stimuli: nature, silence, calm reading, a warm bath.

CHAPTER 5

When to seek specialist attention.

The tools in this guide are a first step. But there is a point at which exhaustion exceeds what self-care can resolve. If you recognise two or more of the following, it is time to seek medical and/or specialist attention:

- You have had fatigue for more than 3 months that does not improve with rest
- Your sleep has structurally changed: you fall asleep but wake repeatedly
- You have noticed a sustained drop in cognitive performance
- Your emotional reactivity has increased and you struggle to recognise yourself
- You have had episodes of palpitations, tension or unexplained physical symptoms
- Your blood tests come back normal but your body says something is not right

TCM offers a complementary functional perspective that may provide additional information about the energetic state of the organism, independently of analytical results. A 90-minute assessment session gives a complete picture and a plan from the TCM perspective..

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