

# Inappropriate Diet – A Major Cause of Psychological Disorders

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional imbalances and mental illnesses are continuously increasing and have become one of the plagues of modern society. One of the main contributing factors is the modern diet. The only form of medicine that has precisely described the pathophysiological mechanisms by which the prolonged and excessive consumption of certain types of food can lead to specific diseases is Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Here we report a case where the use of diet therapy with lifestyle changes according to TCM principles combined with acupuncture and TCM plant therapy is used for a patient with insomnia and depression.

Implementation of the lifestyle and dietary prescription was done from week one of treatment, the patient proved very receptive to them. Acupuncture was administered for 10 consecutive days, TCM herbal therapy was initiated from day one of treatment and continued for the next three months.

Condition gradually improved over three months while following the prescribed lifestyle discipline, sleep improved significantly from week one of treatment, and so did the depression along with associated symptoms.

In conclusion diet can be a major determinant in mental illnesses, advising the patient on lifestyle discipline is an important part of treatment, treatment as a whole must be individualized and adapted, including consideration of the season in which it is applied.

**Keywords:** Nutrition, Mental Illness, Energies, Heaven, Man, Earth, Disease, Healing

### Introduction

Health means both physical strength and endurance, as well as mental strength and resilience. Physical and mental well-being depend, on the one hand, on the Prenatal Heaven (constitutional type and behavior), and on the other hand, on the Postnatal Heaven, or the vital energy that the human body acquires after birth through nutrition, living conditions, work, etc.

Our study was born out of the need to shed light on the mystery behind the appearance of emotional imbalances—sometimes quite severe—in young patients who were raised and live in family and social environments without particular problems, as confirmed by the patients themselves.

Nutrition may hold the key to unlocking this mystery.

Nutrition refers to the quality, quantity, and temperature of foods and drinks ingested, as well as dietary discipline. Dietary discipline includes the number and timing of meals, how one eats, and the state of rest or physical and mental activity during meals. Foods and drinks ingested can provoke bodily imbalances that manifest as psychic disorders, even when their quantity and quality are adequate but are consumed at inappropriate times, during other activities, or in states of nervousness or overexcitement.

To clearly define the dependence of mental health on diet, one must establish the connections between foods – internal organs – emotions, the mutual interdependence links between the organs, the place and role of the brain among the body's organs, and its connections to the internal organs.

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Su Wen, Chapter 5: “In the human body, there are five Zang organs that produce five types of Qi, responsible for five emotional activities: joy or happiness – Xǐ 喜, irritability or anger – Nù 怒, melancholy or sadness – Bēi 悲, concern – Yōu 忧, fear or horror – Kǒng 恐[1-4].”

According to the statements in Ling Shu, Chapter 8, Benshen, the Shen of the Heart, receives and coordinates all perceptions, responses, and cognitive processes. The Shen of the Heart governs language, social behavior, and communication skills, which are diminished or even lost when this organ is imbalanced. Clinical manifestations indicating Shen disturbance include dyslogia, aphasia, incoherent speech, coma, psychoses, mania, and delirium.

The Shen of the Heart perceives, recognizes, processes, and coordinates information, supported by the Yi of the Spleen, which governs attention, thought, memory, and ideation in the process of analyzing and synthesizing information. This process continues under the influence of the concentration power and determination of the Zhi of the Kidney, whose role is to draw final conclusions.

Thus, a person's intelligence and wisdom depend on the proper functioning of the Heart, Spleen, and Kidneys.

Skill, willpower, and determination depend on the proper functioning of the Kidney. Memory problems, cognitive disorders, and dementia occur when the Zhi of the Kidney is imbalanced. The Liver houses the ethereal soul, Hun, which is responsible, among other things, for visual and proprioceptive perceptions. Hun is connected to the Blood, so any alteration in the quantity, quality, or flow of blood disrupts the state and functions of Hun.

In Ling Shu, Chapter 8, the important relationship between Hun and Shen is also described. The Shen of the Heart oscillates with and exits the body together with Hun, which essentially means it participates in the communication between spirit – body – and the surrounding environment.

The tranquility of the mind and subtle energetic relationships inside the body and between the body and the environment depend on the free communication ability of Shen – Hun, nourished by the Blood of the Liver and Heart. The Shen of the Heart receives visual information through the Hun of the Liver. The harmonious relations and movements of the Shen – Hun couple are the basis of spiritual intelligence and insight.

The Lung houses the corporeal soul, Po. The Po of the Lung participates in receiving perceptions, sensations, and information through the nose and skin. The Po of the Lung is sensitive to environmental aggressions, detecting heat and cold, thus protecting us from dangers. A balanced Po of the Lung confers robustness, responsibility, and agility (Cheng, 1988). The Po of the Lung is responsible for involuntary instinctive movements.

The Hun of the Liver and the Po of the Lung are associated in a Yin – Yang relationship. Just as there is a close relationship between Shen and Hun, there is also a close one between Jing and Po. In Su Wen, Chapter 16, the correspondence of each Zang

organ to a two-month period of the year is described. For the period corresponding to the fifth and sixth months of the year, the body's Qi is very active, especially in the head. Therefore, the head is connected to the Zang organs as the highest organ where vital energy can ascend [4].

In Ling Shu, Chapter 52, it is said: “When Qi arrives at the head, it accumulates in the Brain.

In cases of energetic imbalance in the head, vision will be disturbed and the mind weakened.” [4]. According to Li Shizhen's remarks, “The brain is the repository, fu 府, of the Spirits, shen 府, in relation to the origin, yuan 府” [yuan shen zhi fu 府府府]. The marrow, sui 府, and the brain, nao 府, as the “sea of marrow,” are produced by the Kidneys. But the original essences from the Kidney that accumulate in the brain are constantly refreshed and renewed by the food produced by the stomach and transported by the Spleen. In Ling Shu, chapters 22 and 52 describe how essences and Qi extracted from food by the Stomach ascend to the Lung, the upper orifices, and the brain to invigorate and renew them. When the Stomach is in poor condition, the brain and all Zang-Fu organs will also be in poor condition. If the Stomach lacks sufficient fluids, inflammation and dryness will appear, and mental disturbance may be one of the main symptoms of this pathology!

Ling Shu, Chapter 29: “Excess heat in the Stomach manifests as diarrhea and causes anxiety, cravings, and warm skin above the navel.” [4]. The Brain, as an extraordinary organ, is nourished by the essences of the five Zang organs, has a shu 府 and luo 府 relationship with the Du Mai, a luo relationship with Zu Tai Yang, is penetrated by the Yin Qiao Mai and the Yang Qiao Mai, Zu Jue Yin crosses the Brain, and Shou Shao Yin arrives at the Brain.

Su Wen, Chapter 5: “Wood is one of the five elements; it produces the sour flavor in reaction with the energy of Earth, and it produces ‘Liver’ due to the action of Wood energy, so the sour flavor nourishes the Liver [4].”

The sour flavor produces Liver; excessively sour food affects the tendons, but the spicy flavor can moderate the sour (spicy belongs to Metal, which controls Wood). Bitter is the flavor of Fire; excess bitterness can also consume vital energy, and salty flavor can moderate bitterness (Kidney taste is salty, and Water controls Fire). Sweet produces Spleen; excessive sweetness affects the muscles, but sour dominates sweet (sour is associated with Wood, and Wood controls Earth). Spicy produces Lung. The Lung determines the health of body hair and skin, so the Lung produces hair and skin. However, excessive spicy flavor affects hair and skin. Salty produces Kidney; excessive salty flavor can affect the bones, but sweet counters salty (sweet is the flavor of the Spleen).

Su Wen, Chapter 10: “Excessive consumption of salty foods causes blood stagnation and darkens the face; excessive bitter foods dry the skin and cause loss of body hair; excessive spicy foods cause tendon cramps and nail degradation; excessive sour foods thicken and wrinkle the skin and lips; excessive sweet foods cause bone pain and hair loss. These are the consequences of certain flavors' actions. Therefore, the Heart prefers bitter taste, the Lung prefers spicy, the Liver prefers sour, the Spleen

prefers sweet, and the Kidney prefers salty. These are the relationships between the five flavors and the five Zang organs [4].”

Here we report a case where the use of a combination of three TCM treatment methods is used for a patient with insomnia. Our case study has provided information that might be a useful contribution to prospective randomized investigations of efficiently treating patients with chronic insomnia and depression by using diet therapy with lifestyle changes according to TCM principles combined with acupuncture and TCM plant therapy.

### History and Clinical TCM Assessment

The patient is a 42 years old male, caucasian, construction worker. He came to the clinic for insomnia (at the time of the examination, a total of 4-5 hours of interrupted sleep per night, the patient wakes up 3-4 times per night and has trouble falling asleep again, tiredness upon waking up), depression, agitation, irritability and anger, for which he had been treated by a psychiatrist for three months, with psychotropic medication, without any significant improvement in his condition.

For this reason, the patient refused to take any more medication, and seek alternative therapies. Additional clinical manifestations: palpitations on moderate physical effort, dizziness, low-pitched tinnitus, lower back pain, night sweats.

Patient's medical history reveals consuming daily, large quantities of rich in sugar and caffeine refreshing beverages (Coca-Cola) for over 20 years and, in recent years, daily consumption of energy drinks (Red Bull). During the past year, he worked hard without proper rest and ate inadequately (insufficient caloric and microelements intake, irregular meals, skipping meals, eating late at night).

After a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) consultation, the following were observed:

Constitutional type from a Yin–Yang perspective the patient is a Shao Yang constitutional type.

According to Wu Xing (Five Elements), he is a Fire constitutional type.

Tongue TCM assessment - red tip, narrow, with a central fissure.  
TCM Pulse assessment: thin and rapid  
TCM Diagnosis: Yin Deficiency in the Heart and Kidneys with Empty Heat

The participant was given a full explanation of the processes and risks of the case study and provided verbal and written consent.

A lifestyle regimen with total elimination of all energy drinks, spices, and refined sweets was recommended. Meals at fixed times: 7:00 AM for breakfast; 12:00 PM for lunch; and 6:00 PM for dinner. Relaxation or a short nap of no more than one hour after lunch. Work or other activities scheduled between 7:30 AM – 12:00 PM and 1:00 PM – 5:30 PM. Nighttime sleep between 10:00 PM and 5:30 AM. In the morning after waking, a short slow gymnastics program such as Qigong or Yoga; in the evening, a slow, easy walking or dancing program.

Types of food that were included in the diet:

Foods that nourish Yin:

Vegetables: potato, yam, asparagus, seaweed, beans, squash

Fruits: lemon, lime, mulberries

Nuts and seeds: black sesame

Fish: shellfish

Meat: duck, pork kidney and liver

Eggs: egg yolk

Acupuncture: Point prescriptions that clear Heat and nourish Yin of the Heart and Kidneys. Each patient underwent 10 daily acupuncture sessions then transitioned to one session per week (duration was 30 minutes per day). The acupuncture needles used were 0.35 x 25 mm and 0.35 x 40 mm steel with a silver handle, sterile and disposable. The achievement of 'deqi' was pursued during the insertion of each needle. The 30-minute duration was calculated from the insertion of the last needle in the prescription.

Two-point prescriptions were created, with the patient alternating between supine position (dorsal decubitus) in one session and prone position (ventral decubitus) in the following session.

The treatment was performed by Dr. Angela Tudor, the Honorary President of the Romanian Society of Traditional Chinese Medicine (SRMTC). She is certified with a competence certificate in acupuncture according to the Romanian legislation since 1993, and has studied acupuncture and moxibustion in Taiyuan, Shanxi, China.

TCM Herbal Medicine: An Shui Pian for two months, after that the herbal treatment was changed by replacing An Shui Pian with Liuwei Dihuang Wan to balance the constitutional Yin deficiency.

Efficacy assessment was done at day 5 and 10 of acupuncture treatment, and then, at the weekly acupuncture session, for a total of 3 months since beginning of treatment. Parameters assessed were mean number of hours of sleep per night since the last checkup, mean number of sleeps interruptions per night since the last checkup, and the presence of associated symptoms mentioned by the patient in the initial evaluation.

### Outcome

The patient's adherence to the prescribed lifestyle regimen was better than expected.

He was able to apply the dietary recommendations (types of food), respected the times for the meals, he was able to rest after lunch and he started taking walks in the park after work.

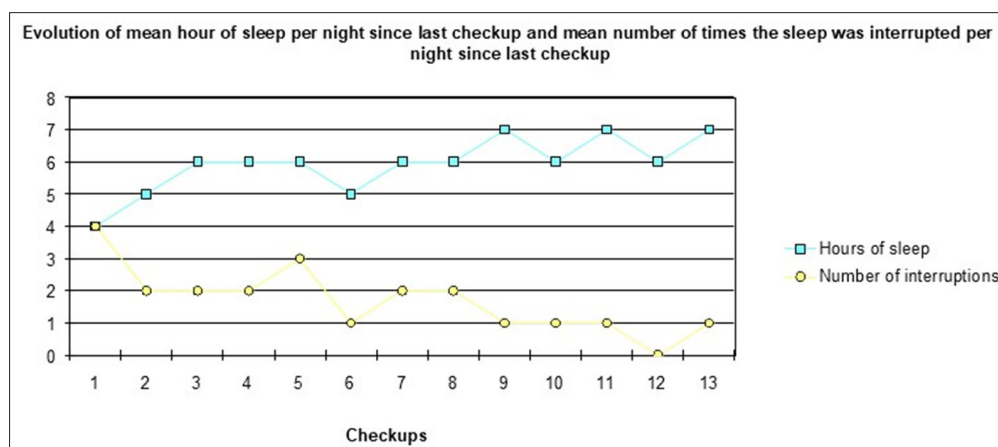
He was not able to adjust his working hours precisely, he did not do any exercises in the morning, he went to bed at around 10:30 - 11:00pm although at first, he did not fall asleep, he lied still without any external stimuli (TV, phone, etc.)

The patient did not skip any acupuncture sessions, and administered all the TCM phytotherapeutic medicine.

Condition gradually improved over three months while following the prescribed lifestyle discipline.

Insomnia resolved after the first week of treatment, with gradual increase of hours of sleep per night and less episodes of sleep interruption (See Table 1). Depression symptoms as well as the other signs and symptoms also decreased gradually by the last checkup.

**Table 1: Evolution Of Mean Hours of Sleep Per Night Since the Last Checkup and Mean Number of Times Sleep Was Interrupted Per Night Since Last Checkup**



1- day 0 evaluation; 2- day 5 evaluation; 3- day 10 evaluation; 4 - week 1 evaluation; 5 - week 2 evaluation; 6 - week 3 evaluation; 7 - week 4 evaluation; 8 - week 5 evaluation; 9 - week 6 evaluation; 10 - week 7 evaluation; 11 - week 8 evaluation; 12 - week 9 evaluation; 13 - week 10 evaluation;

## Discussions

For the demonstration we have proposed, it is necessary to list the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) syndromes that can cause mental illnesses. We have chosen, for our demonstration, some of the most widespread mental illnesses faced by modern society. In the following tables, we have not mentioned those syndromes for which diet is not the determining triggering factor. Even in those syndromes, nutrition can promote the onset or worsening of the illness.

**Table 2: Imbalances That Can Manifest as Manic-Depressive Syndrome (Dian Kuang)**

TCM Syndromes – Dian Kuang	Dietary Causes
Liver Qi stagnation	Irregular meals, excessive alcohol consumption
Qi stagnation with phlegm accumulation	Excess of greasy, hot foods
Qi deficiency in Heart and Spleen	Excess of cold and raw foods, sweets Irregular meals
Yang deficiency in Spleen and Kidneys	Excess of cold and raw foods Dairy products, raw vegetables, fruits
Qi and Yin deficiency	Nutrient-poor diet Excess of greasy foods
Phlegm-Fire disturbing the mind	Excess of greasy, salty, hot, spicy foods (roasted meat, alcohol, spices, nuts)
Yin deficiency producing Fire in Heart and Kidneys	Excess of hot, spicy foods, alcohol, spices Irregular meals, eating under stress or in a hurry Mutton, seafood
Phlegm stagnation	Excess of greasy, sweet, cold and raw foods, dairy products

**Table 3: Imbalances That Can Manifest as Schizophrenia**

TCM Syndromes	Dietary Causes
Phlegm-Fire disturbing the mind	Excess of greasy, salty, hot, spicy foods (roasted meat, alcohol, spices, nuts) Contaminated food, alcohol
Qi stagnation with phlegm accumulation	Excess of greasy, salty, cold and raw foods, dairy products
Qi deficiency in Heart and Spleen	Excess of cold and raw foods, sweets Irregular meals Protein-poor diet
Yin deficiency in Heart and Kidney	Excess of hot, spicy foods, alcohol, spices Irregular meals, eating under stress or in a hurry Mutton, seafood

TCM Syndromes	Dietary Causes
Phlegm hardening due to Blood stagnation	Excess of greasy, sweet, cold and raw foods, dairy products

**Table 4: Imbalances That May Manifest as Dementias**

TCM Syndromes	Dietary Causes
Yin deficiency in the Liver and Kidney	Excessive red meat, alcohol, tobacco, spices
Yang deficiency in the Spleen and Kidney	Excessive cold and raw foods (fruits, vegetables, cold drinks)
Qi and Blood deficiency	Unbalanced diets (drastic slimming diets), poorly planned vegetarian diets
Qi and Yin deficiency	Irregular meals, eating hurriedly, late at night
Accumulation of Phlegm and Heat in the Lung	Excessive fatty, salty, hot, spicy foods (roast meat, alcohol, spices, nuts), contaminated food, alcohol

**Table 5: Imbalances That May Manifest as Psychotic Tremors**

TCM Syndromes	Dietary Causes
Liver Wind stirring internally	Excessive eating, too much hot, spicy foods, alcohol, roasted meat (especially lamb and beef)
Phlegm-Fire generating Wind	Excessive fatty, salty, hot, spicy foods (roasted meat, alcohol, spices, nuts), contaminated food, alcohol
Qi and Blood Deficiency	Unbalanced diets (drastic slimming diets), poorly planned vegetarian diets
Kidney Yang Deficiency	Excessive cold and raw foods (fruits, vegetables, cold drinks)

### Pathophysiological Analysis of The Present Case

In TCM, the Heart and Kidneys have a mutually supportive relationship and should function in tandem at all times. Jing—the essence of the Kidneys—creates the Brain, which houses the “spirit” located in the Heart. The Heart sends Fire downward to warm the Kidneys, which in turn send pure fluids upward to nourish the Heart. In conclusion, the Heart pushes downward, while the Kidneys push upward and pull downward, maintaining balance.

In Yin Deficiency of the Heart and Kidneys with Empty Heat, these downward pushing and pulling movements are greatly reduced, leaving excess Yang that generates Empty Heat. It is “empty” because there is insufficient Yin to cool it. Su Wen Chapter 5 states: “When pathogenic heat invades the body, it can make the patient irritable and depressed; excess heat also causes abdominal distension. All these symptoms can be caused by even moderate excess Yang, or strong Yang due to Yin deficiency.” The question arises whether diet can cause excess heat by Yin deficiency.

In this case, the patient presents constitutional Excess Heat due to a constitutional Yin deficiency and has long consumed excessive sugary and caffeinated drinks. Among other sensitivities, people with a Fire constitutional type are prone to imbalances that can cause mental illnesses. At the same time, the patient is Shao Yang constitutional type—Yang by constitutional Yin deficiency.

It is important to understand that this body type only indicates a constitutional tendency toward Yin Deficiency, not a full Yin Deficiency syndrome. Pathologically, such individuals tend to develop Yin or Essence Deficiency. When ill, they most often present with Empty Heat or Dryness syndromes.

Coffee has a sweet and bitter taste and a warm nature. It stimulates Heart Qi and Large Intestine Qi [5]. Coffee grows in the tropics and is imported from distant countries, so its Jing

essence does not correspond to the patient’s Jing essence, who was born and lives in a temperate zone. Moreover, roasting increases the food’s heat, altering its natural Jing essence.

Sugar has a sweet taste and a warm nature [5]. The sugar in energy drinks (Coca-Cola, Red Bull) comes from sugar cane, so neither its Jing essence (sugar cane is always grown in tropical areas) is compatible with our patient’s Jing essence. The tastes of these products, sweet and bitter, produce the following effects: Gan 甘 = sweet, sugar and its derivatives [1,2,3,6]. This corresponds to the Earth element and has tonifying, restorative, moisturizing, slowing, and harmonizing properties. In moderate amounts, it moistens joints and muscles, soothes joint pain and contractures, neutralizes toxins, reduces harmful effects of other foods, dissolves Lung phlegm, induces sweating, and lubricates the intestines and lungs. In excess, it harms the Heart and Kidneys, the Spleen, and muscles, promotes hair loss, and causes bone pain.

The sweet taste acts on the Spleen, slowing and lubricating. Excessive sweet intake can cause shortness of breath by affecting Heart Qi (Xinqi). When the Spleen is too strong, it restricts Kidney Water and causes a dark complexion. When Kidney Water is too restricted, kidney disease ensues. Ku 苦 = bitter, coffee, tobacco, chocolate. This corresponds to the Fire element and has dehydrating, hardening, stiffening, consolidating, evacuating, dispersing, and purgative properties. Excessive consumption of bitter foods injures vital energy, dehydrates the Spleen and skin, exhausts Yin and body fluids, damages bones and teeth, reduces appetite by lowering gastric acid production, and promotes hair loss.

The bitter taste acts on the Heart. If bitter predominates, the Heart will be affected, Spleen Qi (Piqi) will stagnate, and Stomach Qi (Weiqi) will become diseased. When Heart Fire is affected, the Earth of the Spleen is no longer “moistened” (Fire dries



fluids). When the Spleen cannot moisten, it cannot transport or support Stomach transport activity, so the Stomach is attacked by pathogenic Dryness and creates a feeling of distension.

### Conclusions

1. Diet can be a major determinant in mental illnesses.
2. Burn-out syndrome can result from inappropriate food combinations, especially excessive consumption of energy drinks.
3. Constitutional type partly explains why some individuals are more vulnerable than others.
4. Advising the patient on lifestyle discipline is an important part of treatment.
5. Treatment as a whole must be individualized and adapted, including consideration of the season in which it is applied.

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