

Weight Loss with TCM

Although there is no miracle cure for weight loss, a variety of natural and alternative treatments, lifestyle change, and dietary modifications can be used as an adjunctive therapy. TCM helps to begin, achieve and maintain their weight loss goals by addressing the underlying physical and mental / emotional cause of weight problems.

Obesity

Obesity is a medical condition in which excess body fat has accumulated to the extent that it may have an adverse effect on health, leading to reduced life expectancy and/or increased health problems. [Body mass index \(BMI\)](#), a measurement which compares weight and height, defines people as overweight (pre-obese) when their BMI is between 25 kg/m² and 30 kg/m², and obese when it is greater than 30 kg/m².

The most common cause of obesity is a combination of excessive dietary calories and lack of physical activity. The body stores excess calories as fat when there is more calories intake than consumption. Certain genetic and endocrine disorders, (i.e. Cushing's syndrome, polycystic ovary syndrome, or hypothyroidism), medications (i.e. antidepressants, anti-seizure medications, diabetes medications, or antipsychotic medications), or psychiatric illness (i.e. depression, addiction, or eating disorders) also influence on body weight.

Obesity increases the likelihood of various diseases, particularly heart disease, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, certain types of cancer(including uterus, cervix, ovary, breast, colon, rectum and prostate cancer), and osteoarthritis. Obese persons are also vulnerable to low self-esteem and depression because of the psychological and social stigmas that can be associated with obesity.

The primary treatment for obesity is dieting and physical exercise. [Anti-obesity drugs](#), such as Sibutramine (Meridia) or Orlistat (Xenical), may be taken to reduce appetite or inhibit fat absorption. In severe cases, surgical procedures, such as [gastric bypass](#) or [adjustable gastric banding](#), can be used to reduce stomach volume and/or bowel length, leading to earlier satiation and reduced ability to absorb nutrients from food. Numerous dietary supplements, including herbal remedies, vitamins and minerals are available over-the-counter as well.

Obesity in Traditional Chinese Medicine

In TCM, fat or adipose tissue is mostly due to phlegm and dampness accumulation. The spleen is the root of all phlegm and damp production as it is the organ controlling the transportation and transformation of body fluids and foods. If the

spleen is constitutionally weak or becomes damaged by improper diet and lack of physical activity, it will fail to transport and transform waste fluids and foods. These metabolic wastes will gather, collect and transform into dampness and phlegm.

Although the main cause of obesity is phlegm and dampness, each individual presents with different symptoms according to their underlying disharmony and constitution. The main differentiation of patterns for obesity are spleen deficiency with dampness accumulation, hyperactive stomach with hypoactive spleen, phlegm-dampness obstruction in the middle burner, qi and blood stagnation, and spleen and kidney yang deficiency. Like the treatment for other diseases, TCM treatment for obesity is based on the pattern differentiation.

- **Spleen Deficiency with Dampness** In this pattern, the spleen is not able to transport and transform resulting in accumulation of dampness which will cause obesity. The accompanying symptoms include obesity or overweight with edema, heaviness of extremities, fatigue, abdominal distention, poor appetite, loose stool, pale and swollen tongue with soft thin or slippery pulse.
- **Hyperactive Stomach and Hypoactive Spleen** Over consumption of heavy, greasy and spicy foods or alcohol produces stomach heat and damages the spleen. The over-heated stomach can digest food easier and creates hunger, but the spleen cannot transport and transform the excessive food. As a result, the stagnant metabolic products turn into phlegm and dampness, causing overweight. Some of the symptoms include excessive hunger, thirst, fever, constipation, abdominal pain, red tongue yellow coating, and rapid and slippery pulse.
- **Phlegm Dampness Obstruction in Middle Jiao** This pattern is mostly caused by consuming too much rich and greasy food. The main symptoms include heaviness and numbness in limbs, dizziness, and distention in the head. There is a greasy or yellow greasy tongue, wiry and slippery pulse.
- **Qi and Blood Stagnation** Lack of physical activity or emotional stress can inhibit the circulation of Qi and blood and cause accumulation. Accompanying symptoms will include stabbing pain in the chest or hypochondria, irregular menstruation or amenorrhea, dark or purple tongue, and wiry or choppy pulse.
- **Spleen and Kidney Yang Deficiency** This pattern is related to the constitution of the individual. Some of the accompanying signs are fatigue, loose stool, cold hands and feet, edema on the lower limbs, sore knees and low back, pale tongue with white slippery coating, deep and thin pulse

Weight Loss with TCM

Rather than focusing on reducing excess weight only, TCM treats the underlying body condition that may have led to the excess weight. Once the body's balance is restored, the metabolism will process food properly, and excess weight should no longer be a problem as long as maintain proper diet and lifestyle.

The treatment for obesity with TCM begins with the exclusion of secondary causes of weight gain and the identification of coexisting disorders such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, and sleep apnea. Once the evaluation is completed, treatment plan will be established according to the patient's underlying condition as well as the goals for losing weight.

How does TCM help losing weight?

Since TCM treat the physical, mental and emotional components to any illness, there are several ways that they can benefit you while you are trying to lose weight.

- **Seducing Food Craving** Acupuncture helps control appetite by stimulating endorphin release and promotes calming and relaxing effect on the body. Naturally releasing endorphins makes it easier to deal with stress, frustration and anxiety which can be triggers for emotional eating, overeating and bingeing on fattening foods. The use of ear acupuncture has been proven effective in reducing appetite and food craving as well.
- **Regulating Metabolism** Long-term history of irregular eating, overeating and lack of physical activity leads to slow metabolism. Acupuncture can help to increase metabolism by stimulating the thyroid and endocrine glands as the body adjusts to the changes in diet and lifestyle. Affecting the endocrine system also helps to stabilize blood sugar levels and blood pressure.
- **Benefiting Digestion** Combined with proper nutritional changes, acupuncture and Chinese herbs help to harmonize the digestive organs and benefit digestion. Proper digestion ensures that the body is getting enough nutrients you need from food so you feel less hungry. TCM can also help with secondary symptoms from poor digestion, such as bloating, gas, heartburn, constipation or diarrhea.
- **Increasing Energy Level** Stimulating endorphin release by acupuncture not only helps with emotional stress, but also relaxes muscle tensions and improves circulation of Qi and blood. In TCM, stagnant Qi and blood is the main cause of hundreds of diseases. By promoting Qi and blood circulation, acupuncture can reduce body pain from carrying heavy weight and increase energy level, making the patient able to have a more active lifestyle.
- **Cleaning** Chinese herbs are particularly helpful in eliminating metabolic toxins that have been built up over time from excess weight and adipose tissue.
- **Reducing Size of the Specific Part of the Body** While acupuncture and Chinese herbs help reducing adipose tissue from the whole body, modern acupuncture technique called electrolipolysis can reduce size of the specific areas of the body, such as thighs, legs or abdomen, by enhancing metabolism of the local adipose tissue.
- **Reducing Side Effects Caused by Dieting** When people try to lose weight quickly by restricted diet without evaluating their underlying conditions, they often suffer form side effects caused by dieting, such as dizziness, hair loss, or anxiety. Since TCM primarily focuses on treating underlying conditions and harmonizing and balancing the body's function, it minimizes the side effects from dieting and actually makes patients healthier while losing weight.

How many treatments will I need?

The frequency and number of acupuncture treatments necessary depends on the patient's goals for losing weight, the speed at which they want to lose, and their commitment to a new, healthier lifestyle. In the beginning, it is important to receive consistent treatments to help get you started. For the average patient who wants to lose between 5 to 10 pounds, 1-2 weekly treatments are recommended in the beginning. Once you are feeling comfortable with your new weight loss plan, the frequency and number of treatments will decrease to 1-2 visits a month. When you have reached

your weight loss goals, the patient and practitioner will mutually decide when to terminate frequent treatments and then can aim to meet approximately four times a year (at the change of seasons) to keep your system balanced and healthy.

Does it rebound afterwards?

Rebounding is the most common problem in any weight loss programs. Rebounding usually occurs when the patients go back to the ex-lifestyle which led them to having weight problems, therefore leads to a rebound as well. When there was significant weight loss in a short period of time, there is a higher chance of rebounding. In a short-term diet program, the fatty cell size setting in the hypothalamus does not change although the patients lose body weight; therefore, the fatty cells will try to regain the original size after the program and cause rebound.

TCM approach to weight loss is to assist the patients achieve and enjoy their new and healthy lifestyle while losing weight, rather than enforcing the restricted diet with disciplines. By addressing the underlying disharmony and restoring the body's natural rhythm, TCM weight loss program can successfully reduce the chance of rebound for most patients.

Electrolipolysis

In addition to regular body and ear acupuncture, Chinese herbal supplement and life style management, NOLA Acupuncture Wellness Center offers special acupuncture procedure called [electrolipolysis](#).

Electrolipolysis involves the insertion of fine acupuncture needles directly into the fat tissue layer and running a weak, low frequency electric current through the area to reduce localized body fat and improve the quality and appearance of the skin. The fat melted in electrolipolysis procedure will be eliminated through urination.

This unique technique has been used over 10 years in Korea and Europe, and is especially effective in reducing the accumulated fat tissue from the thighs, buttocks, hips, and abdomen. Electrolipolysis is aimed at the people with mild localized cellulite on the specific areas of the body. It isn't recommended for severe overweight people or adolescents.

References

Obesity. (2011, September 23). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Obesity&oldid=451990622>

Obesity. (2011, May 6). In *MayoClinic.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/obesity/DS00314>

TCM and Weight Management. (2010, August 24). In *Acupuncture Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=32277>

Obesity TCM Treatment Guides Cure Chinese Medicine. (n.d.). In *TCM Discovery*. Retrieved from <http://www.tcmdiscovery.com/Obesity.asp>

Chinese Herbs Treating Weight Loss. (2009, September 12). In *TCM Well*. Retrieved from http://www.tcmwell.com/TCM_News/weightloss/Chinese-Herbs-Treating-Weight-Loss.html

Weight Loss, Natural Appetite Suppressants. (2009, September 03). In *TCM Well*. Retrieved from http://www.tcmwell.com/TCM_News/weightloss/Weight-Loss-Natural-Appetite-Suppressants.html

Joswick, D., (n.d.). The Acupuncture Weight Loss Solution. In *Acufinder.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.acufinder.com/Acupuncture+Information/Detail/The+Acupuncture+Weight+Loss+Solution>

Mok, M., Parker, L., Viona, S., & Bray, G., (1976). Treatment of Obesity by Acupuncture. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Volume 29, Number 8, 832-835*. Retrieved from <http://www.ajcn.org/content/29/8/832.full.pdf+html>

Lin, X.M., Li, B., Du, Y.H., Xiong, J., & Sun, P., (2009). Systematic Evaluation of Therapeutic Effect of Acupuncture for Treatment of Simple Obesity. *Zhong Guo Zhen Jiu. 2009 Oct; 29(10):856-60*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19873927>

Cherniack, P., (2008). Potential Applications for Alternative Medicine to Treat Obesity in an Aging Population. *Alternative Medicine Review, Number 1 2008, Volume 13*. Retrieved from <http://www.thorne.com/altmedrev/.fulltext/13/1/34.pdf>

Cabioğlu, M.T. & Ergene, N., (2005). Electroacupuncture Therapy for Weight Loss Reduces Serum Total Cholesterol, Triglycerides, and LDL Cholesterol Levels in Obese Women. *American Journal of Chinese Medicine, 2005;33(4):525-33*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16173527>

He, L., Gao, X.L., Deng, H.X. & Zhao, Y.X., (2008). Effects of Acupuncture on Body Mass Index and Waist-Hip Ratio in the Patient of Simple Obesity. *Zhong Guo Zhen Jiu. 2008 Feb; 29(10):856-60*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18405150>