

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

An alternative point of view

Many Irish people choose to attend an alternative practitioner rather than their GP when they feel unwell – for example, when they have sinus problems, bloating or arthritic pain. The alternative practitioners they choose to see may be traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practitioners.

TCM involves a different medical mindset to mainstream Western medicine. For example, in Chinese food therapy, foods are valued for the effect they have on our internal organs.

In Western diets foods are valued according to their protein, vitamin, calorie, carbohydrate and other nutrient make-up.

Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners often suggest withdrawing dairy products from the diet to ease symptoms as they believe that milk, along with fatty fried foods, can cause an increase of mucus in the system.

We asked former agricultural researcher turned acupuncturist Keir McNamara from the Turnpike Clinic in Ennis for more information about the traditional Chinese medicine stance on the consumption of dairy products.

“In general, the message would be that dairy is not the devil you might see it described as in some forums, but there are times when it isn’t helping a person’s condition and they may have to back off from it for a time until they have improved,” Keir says.

Dairy products are rarely singled out for mention in reputable texts on Chinese medicine as being the only or main cause of many of the conditions listed, he says.

“Dairy consumption in China is quite low and while it is increasing as the country prospers, its per capita consumption is still only about one-fifth of that of most European countries.”

The controversy surrounding traditional Chinese medicine and dairy products is related to conditions caused by what are referred to as ‘damp’ and ‘phlegm’ in the Chinese system, according to the acupuncturist.

“Damp and phlegm are caused by many different factors and affect the spleen channel – one

of the most important ones in the Chinese system. This can lead to conditions such as fatigue, body heaviness, sluggishness, cysts, tumours, yeast infections, bloating and gas, unclear thinking, chronic sinus infections, cloudy urine, foul smelling stools, thick tongue coating, to name but a few.”

Dietary therapy is often as much a part of the treatment of a patient with conditions caused by these factors as acupuncture and herbal medicine, he adds.

“In the Chinese system, a person can consume foods of virtually any nature without harm so long as the quantity is reasonable. In the case of dairy products, three servings a day is a reasonable quantity but for a person who is unhealthy, both the quantity of a substance and its nature take on more significance.

“Thus, a person who has an excess of phlegm or damp tends to do better with low overall food intake and ingestion of ‘drying’ substances, until the syndrome is rectified.

“Chinese texts single out the excessive consumption of many different food types as being contributory factors in the development of certain conditions.

“‘Damp foods’ of which dairy products are only one type (greasy, fried foods, bananas and any other high fat foods would be included) contribute to some of the conditions already outlined. The idea of limiting certain foods when a person has phlegm or damp accumulation syndrome does not mean that the foods must be entirely avoided.

“It certainly does not mean those foods are problematic for other people who do not have these syndromes. If an acupuncturist feels that dairy products are contributing to a certain condition a patient presents with, they will often recommend that they limit their consumption until the symptoms have abated. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the person is allergic to dairy products or that they cannot resume their normal consumption rate when the condition improves. In fact, most do when they are better. It really is done on a case-by-case basis.”

• Keir McNamara practices in Ennis, Co Clare. See www.turnpikeclinic.com

scientific studies on the association between milk and mucus production. Existing evidence fails to confirm a ‘milk mucus’ association.

“What can happen here is that people who believe that milk causes nasal symptoms are more likely to report nasal symptoms and, secondly, it could be that sensory characteristics of some foods can result in this sensation.”

ACNE

There isn’t enough research yet to say, one way or another, whether milk consumption is in any way linked to acne.

“More research is needed but in the meantime, professional dermatology organisations recommend a balanced diet for anyone with acne.

“Dairy foods are very important in the diet of teenagers who are going through a rapid period of growth and laying down bone mass.

“This is of particular concern given that 42% of teen-

age girls have insufficient calcium intake as well as 23% of boys. We want to reassure teenagers that dairy can be part of their diet.”

BREAST CANCER

There have been several media stories claiming potential links between drinking milk and breast cancer, she says.

“That’s along with some alternative practitioners suggesting that removing dairy from the diet could prevent or even cure breast cancer.

This view is not endorsed by the medical and scientific community,” she says.

She gives two examples including the *European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition* published in 2009, which found no link, she says.

The World Cancer Research Fund, she points out, does not recommend restricting dairy foods for the prevention of breast or any other cancer.

“Having cancer means

that a person is at a very vulnerable stage in their life. Some of the sources that link milk and breast cancer depend on personal experiences and personal beliefs and when the media highlight these stories, it can result in confusion.

“People who are at a very vulnerable stage in their life can easily be influenced to comply with this type of advice,” Dr Logan says. **CL**

WORDS OF LIFE

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.

I John ch.4 v 15

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Unfinished business

We’re all familiar with the phrase “making a mountain out of a molehill” and sometimes our reactions to certain people and situations certainly resonate with this adage. Fritz Perl, a founder of Gestalt Therapy, once said that over 90% of our current reaction to a situation has got very little to do with that situation. Our current reaction has got far more to do with a past experience yet to be resolved. When things are not resolved, unexpressed feelings linger in the background and are carried into present life in ways that interfere with how we deal with people and things.

In that sense, unless and until we face and deal with a past unresolved experience, it will continue to rear its head in our present experience. It’s known as “unfinished business” in Gestalt terminology. It’s often how patterns of behaviour develop, and – more importantly – how patterns of behaviour are repeated.

If I were to ask you to call to mind someone who annoys you or causes you frustration today, answer me this: who does he or she remind you of? Is it fair to say that they remind you of someone or something from your past that has been left unresolved?

The argument goes as follows: unless and until you resolve this issue, it will continue to repeatedly manifest itself in various forms in your day-to-day experience. If you work for someone who is bullying you and you decide to leave rather than addressing how the bullying is impacting on you, chances are you will encounter bullying in your next employment.

How many times have we marvelled at how we always seem to end up with a similar boss or partner, etc? Patterns develop from unresolved business, and if left unaddressed the

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pattern continues. This pattern is even passed down to our children. For example, children of alcoholic parents often end up marrying an alcoholic.

Here’s another adage for you: “if you spot it, you’ve got it”. Some people say that any trait you see in another person that you do not like, it is because that trait is in yourself – only you probably deny this to yourself or are completely unaware of it.

There’s a story told about Socrates who was asked by a traveller if he was on the right road to Athens. Socrates assured the traveller he was on the right road and that Athens was straight ahead of him. The traveller then asked him what the people of Athens were like? Socrates replied: “Tell me where you come from, and what the people there are like, and I’ll tell you about the people of Athens.”

“I’m from Argos and I’m proud and happy to tell you that the people of Argos are the friendliest, happiest, most generous people you could ever wish to meet.”

“And I’m very happy to tell you that the people of Athens are exactly the same,” said Socrates.

Shortly after, another traveller passed Socrates on the road who was looking for Athens. This traveller also asked Socrates: “What are the people of Athens like?”

Again, Socrates replied: “Tell me where you come from, and what the people there are like, and I’ll tell you about the people of Athens.”

“I’m from Argos, and I’m sad and disappointed to tell you that the people of Argos are the meanest, most miserable, least friendly people you could ever wish to meet.”

“And I’m very disappointed to tell you, my friend,” said Socrates, “that the people of Athens are exactly the same.” **CL**

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