

Acu News

"A good fortune may forbode a bad luck, which may in turn disguise a good fortune." - Chinese Proverb

TCM & MENOPAUSE: *The Second Spring*

In horticulture, "second spring" is a term used for that time in early autumn, after the hot and dry end of summer, when a little moisture returns, temps cool and there is a second blooming. Autumn is harvest time, but it's also a time to rework the garden beds for some fall crops, a second helping at nature's table.

In a woman's life, if spring represents our birth and early years, summer our fertile years, then autumn is a transitional time of pre-menopause/menopause, while winter is the winding down years and death. Menopause as the autumn, and therefore 'second spring' of our lives comes in our developmental life cycles around the ages of 49-55. This is based on the Chinese medical understanding of women's development unfolding in 7 year cycles (vs. men's 8 year cycles). This transitional time leading to menopause usually begins around the 7th of these 7-yr cycles, but can come earlier or later. In TCM, Autumn is a time of letting go, the leaves fall and nature reorganizes it's energetic investments. In a woman's body during this autumnal life change, there are energy shifts from the reproductive organs, where the body had for many years focused on fertility functions, to the heart where the 'shen' or conscious spirit resides.

"Women's heavenly dew wanes, qi that dwelt in the baby's palace, moves up to the heart, and her wisdom is deepened."- Nei Jing (2600 BC)

It is thought that your emotional center (the heart) gets its qi back and a woman's personal and spiritual life can take center stage. This creates fertile ground for the 'second spring' of personal insights and new ideas. The fruit of life's experience is ripe enough to enjoy as the earned wisdom and understanding that comes with age. And while aging is feared, even at times demonized, in modern western cultures, it is understood as a natural life process and an accomplishment worthy of respect in most Asian cultures. The elderly are revered for their knowledge and maturity. This difference in perception deeply affects the experience of menopausal women. The negative stigma placed on aging in the U.S., especially for women, creates an extra mental and emotional burden.

Many women, especially in Asian cultures, do not experience the symptoms associated with menopause, such as hot flashes, mood swings and fatigue. Some women even experience more energy at menopause. This is because menopause is actually a homeostatic mechanism that slows down the aging process in women. It is designed to conserve energy and blood, as the body can stop expending it on the menstrual cycle and reproduction. It is in this sense that we can think of it as a healthy transition, one just in time to slow down, then stop our reproductive function to conserve our essence and energy to allow us to get the most out of the final season of our lives.

So, why do some women suffer through while others welcome this transition? It's a matter of balance, as always, in Chinese Medicine. There needs to be an adjustment period where the body can re-stabilize while certain energetic (and hormonal) changes occur. Some people are more flexible and better equipped to handle the fluctuations. They can therefore easily re-center their own yin-yang balance in the body. Many factors affect this ability such as constitution (genetics), lifestyle, diet, environmental exposures, and even cultural influences. Acupuncture and herbs can greatly assist this process too, as they can help to guide the body's energy back into a state of balance.

It is time to reframe our understanding of menopause as a time to celebrate the gifts that come with the closure of women's reproductive years. Women can honor this time with rest, reflection, and a re-assessment of direction, relationships, career etc. and be rewarded with a second spring, a time of renewed energy and purpose.

***Regular acupuncture
can help with all kinds
of life transitions,
including menopause,
and help you cash
in on the benefits
of those important
shifts! Get in ASAP to
set up an appropriate
treatment plan!***

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