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Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal™: “Changing the Face of Aging”

STRESS AND THE ADRENALS: THE INCREDIBLE BURDEN OF “DOING” VS. THE LIGHTNESS OF “BEING”

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Mary Elizabeth has contributed to and/or been interviewed for articles in *Alternative Medicine, Qi Magazine, Oriental Medicine Journal, and CA Journal of Oriental Medicine*, and has trained over 2,500 practitioners in her unique philosophy and treatment protocols.

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Dr. Lane has been involved in the health care, nutrition, and wellness field for over the past decade. She has served as a nutrition and wellness consultant, an author of medical articles, a lecturer, a teacher, a medical expert on *Health Insights* radio show on KXAM and KXXT radio, and was selected in the exclusive Top Businesses in Naturopathic Physicians which was listed in the *2005 Arizona Woman Who's Who in Business* in Arizona Woman magazine. She is currently the director of Arizona Natural Medicine, L.L.C., which provides comprehensive and integrative medical care for woman and their families.

Stress is one of the most prevalent influences in our lives today. To cite a relevant statistic, In Australia, for example, in 2001-2002, neurotic, stress-related and somatoform disorders resulted in 49,415 hospitalizations, while 95% of hospital consultant episodes were a consequence of reactions to severe stress and adjustment disorders¹. Our daily lives are an orchestration of duties,

¹ Source: AIHW Hospital Morbidity Database 2001-02, Australia's Health 2004, AIHW, found at URL: http://www.cureresearch.com/s/somatoform_disorders/stats.htm, Internet, accessed 6/1/07.

responsibilities, and detailed tasks that seem to be never-ending and take a toll on our bodies. This persistent influence in our lives, over time, leaves its seeming indelible imprint upon the lines, expressions, and vitality of our face, where the influences of heaven and earth merge to create a canvas of each of our individual lives. And although these visible manifestations of stress may appear more readily in those habitual contracted movements of the facial muscles that we associate with the process of aging, the face itself is not the culprit; its altered landscape should rather, provide us with the stimulus to look elsewhere in the body in order to identify those sources of stress which we may best address through lifestyle changes, etc., an indispensable adjunct to the holistic treatment protocols of *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal*™.

In this manner, the face can be seen to function as a barometer for the overall “climate” of the body itself, and evident stress seen in the face telegraphs the presence of physiological imbalance elsewhere in the body.

According to Taoist monks, the human body was considered to be a microcosm of the entirety of creation, exhibiting, in its fundamental symmetries and ideal harmony of functioning, the perfection of the Universe as a manifestation of the Divine. And the face, its most emotive part, was seen as a similar system, an encapsulation of the 3 Treasures - Qi, Jing and Shen.

As Sage Lu Tung-Pin has said:

“The human body is composed entirely of essence, energy and spirit. If you do not cherish your essence, and dissipate it recklessly, it is like pouring water into a cracked cup. Instead of filling the cup, it will leak away until it is depleted to the last drop.

If you do not cherish your energy, and dissipate it carelessly, it is like putting incense on hot coals and continuously adding fuel to the fire until the incense has burned to ashes.

If you do not cherish your spirit, and dissipate it indiscriminately, it is like setting a lamp out in the wind unprotected, letting the wind blow on the flame until it is extinguished.”

The question that one could pose when attempting to examine the effects of stress is: can an individual’s vessel, or body, hold or support their Jing? Is this even possible in a society that is clearly “running on empty,” in which individuals on the fast track of highly paid careers routinely dissipate their Jing and Qi in the pursuit of their increasingly materialistic goals? Their bodies may not exhibit any excess fat, but their lack of authentic vitality is clearly evident in the exhausted, flat expressions that emanate from their eyes.

The answer to this question is, of course, crucial to the Oriental medical practitioner, and the patient above would be treated according to specific TCM patterns, or in response to perceived 5 Element imbalances, using herbs, with specific recommendations for improved diet, nutrition, and other lifestyle changes.

The Adrenal Glands

In contrast, in western medicine, one of the most important, but overlooked, aspects of physiological regulation of stress relates to the multifunctional endocrine organs known as the adrenal glands. In TCM, they are best associated with the water element, Kidney. The adrenal glands are located above each ipsilateral kidney and play a vital role in stress modulation and the synthesis of sex hormones. The adrenals secrete three important steroid hormones: cortisol, a

glucocorticoid; aldosterone, a mineralcorticoid; and androgen precursors, largely dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA). The adrenals are essential to life and are involved in a multitude of physiological activities, including blood sugar regulation, protein turnover, fat metabolism, sodium, potassium and calcium balance, modulation of tissue response to injury or infection, and sex hormone production.

Insufficient cortisol production is known as Addison's disease and excessive secretion is known as Cushing's syndrome. Both of these conditions are considered serious and require immediate medical treatment to counteract their effects. Common signs and symptoms of Addison's disease include: fatigue, muscle weakness, nausea, vomiting, craving for salt, polyuria (related to the Water element), weight loss, melasma suprarenale or hyperpigmentation, and postural dizziness. By contrast, Cushing's syndrome is the result of overproduction of cortisol, commonly caused by a neoplasm in the pituitary gland that stimulates an overproduction of cortisol from the adrenals, through the release of excessive ACTH. Symptoms of Cushing's syndrome may include: fatigue, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, weight gain in the trunk and face, excess sweat, telangiectasia, bruising due to the thinning of the skin, facial hair, anxiety, and depression.

The Decline of Adrenal Hormones in the Process of Aging

Cortisol secretion, which is highest in the morning and slowly declines throughout the day, is important in energy and how vital we feel, proper sleep regulation, fat metabolism, anti-inflammatory and immune response. The sex hormone precursor DHEA, which is synthesized from pregnenolone, is an important precursor to other sex hormones, such as, estradiol and testosterone. In woman, these precursors supply about half of the androgenic hormone requirements. That means that during peri-menopause and menopause, when ovarian decline occurs and the primary producers of our sex hormones decline, the adrenals are the only major source left to support hormone production.

Therefore, the slow decline of sex hormones natural in the aging process and the exposure of chronic stress place a burden on the adrenal glands to compensate and work harder to support our daily activity. This decline has a myriad of implications; it affects our sleep cycles, our vitality, our sexual desire, our immune response, our response to pain and inflammation, and our body fat composition.

Adrenal Fatigue

What happens when there is no disease but a down-regulation of function? Signs and symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, weight gain, reduced libido, pain, poor memory, fluid retention, skin inflammation, low blood pressure, low body temperature, craving of stimulants, such as, coffee for energy, frequent colds, flu, and infections, mood changes, and suboptimal response to stress may be common symptoms associated with a down regulation of adrenal function, otherwise known as adrenal fatigue.

Adrenal fatigue is not a disease; it is a condition that reflects a subtle reduction in adrenal function and reserve that significantly impacts our physical and emotional well-being. Adrenal fatigue can be identified based on presenting symptoms, physical examination, and diagnostic salivary testing of DHEA and diurnal 24-hr cortisol. Nutritional, botanical, and glandular support of adrenal function can enhance vitality and restore proper adrenal function.

- Nutritional Support of Adrenals

Vitamin C, E, and the B vitamins, especially pantothenic acid (B5), are important nutrients needed for proper adrenal function. Most of these nutrients can be found in the colorful (green,

red, yellow, orange) fruits and vegetables, such as, spinach, broccoli, kale, yellow and red peppers, and butternut squash. Addition of these foods supplies the proper nourishment for the adrenal to do their job. Oral supplementation can also be provided for further support.

- Botanical Support

There are a multitude of medicinal herbs that serve as adaptogens, which help our body to adapt to stress and regulate hypo or hyper regulation. Some common adaptogenic herbs used to treat adrenal fatigue include: shisandra (*Schisandra chinensis* or *wu-wei-zi*), ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*), gota kola (*Centella asiatica*), licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) which is contra-indication in hypertension, and siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*).

- Glandular Support

Adrenal glandular extracts are typically made from bovine source and are taken orally to nourish and stimulate your own adrenal production. They are typically used for relatively small amounts of time, such as 3 months, to restore function. If taken in high doses too long, in may cause down regulation through a negative feedback system. It is important to get a reputable source to avoid contaminants.

CONCLUSION

As we have previously attested, ours is a society in which highly successful individuals wear as a badge of honor the fact that they never sleep and routinely overwork, and where the new “superparent” juggles baby, bottle, work and play (although the latter is frequently left out of the equation). These overachievers pump up their tired adrenal glands with excessive amounts of caffeine, mounds of dark chocolate (because it is now “good” for us; both of these are, of course, heart yang tonics), or otherwise provide their exhausted bodies with the stimulation of alcohol, nicotine, and over-exercise.

In New York City, there is a bank and a mattress store on every corner; put all that hard-earned cash in the vault, and then collapse ... the opportunity for authentic rest is only presented through the medium of that reluctantly indulged-in annual vacation, kept to an absolute minimum for any number of reasons, and, should you decide to venture somewhat further afield than your living room sofa, new species of stress are added to the mix - airport security, flight schedules, unavoidable delays in your itinerary, traffic jams in new and *exotic* locales. After you arrive, you’re determined to cram in as much “recreational” activity as possible, and then, it’s back to work, let’s hop back on that treadmill once again, running in our little wheel like so many hamsters in a cage ...

When does this juggernaut cease? When we die? What a relief! We have found that the “running on empty” crowd becomes quite resentful when they actually experience a certain level of fatigue after an acupuncture treatment. They often don’t come back. Some do stay and began to reverse the effects of this pernicious adrenal fatigue, but usually only after it becomes chronic; the suggestion of lifestyle changes prior to this point invariably falls upon deaf ears. Luxury “vacations” are ever so much more attractive an option ...

In the midst of this obsessive “doing”, we would do well to hearken back to those wise words of “being”-ness from the sage Lu Tung-Pin; let us cherish our essence, honor our Qi, and nourish our spirit before its flame is permanently extinguished.

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