

# The interplay of Yin and Yang

Similar to the principles underlying the martial arts such as Tai Chi, Taoist healing arts revolve around the constant flux and interplay of Yin and Yang.

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*The Taoist healing arts seek to establish a balance between the mind and spirit to help the body cure itself.*



**R**egardless of their symptoms, all diseases are rooted in a basic imbalance of these two and other energies within the body. And, consistent with a holistic approach to health, Taoist therapies aim at re-establishing the natural primordial harmony of essence, mind and spirit, and helping the body cure itself.

Disease is nothing more but an attempt of the body to rid itself of toxins. It is not necessarily caused by germs but by environmental elements (such as wind, cold, moisture and heat) and internal factors (such as anxiety, stress and depression). In our fast-paced lives we live today, we all have seen how stress wreaks havoc on the body.

To alleviate disease, we must look not at the symptoms but at the root cause and bring the body back into balance. Tao healthcare seeks a whole body treatment by adjusting the imbalance in the body.

Furthermore, it also focuses on strengthening vitality and the body's resistance to illness. It does so by employing natural therapeutic methods such as Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage and of course, diet, breathing and exercise. These therapies alone, or in combination with one another and other treatments will prevent and combat disease, maintain energy balance, regulate the vital organs and harmonise the body, mind and spirit.



## Herbal help

Herbal therapy, which in Taoist tradition always includes diet and nutrition, is the oldest and most widely used method in the Chinese system of healthcare. Chinese herbs are ascribed qualities such as "cooling" (Yin) or "stimulating" (Yang), and are prescribed, often in combination, according to the deficiencies or excesses of these qualities in the patient. The different components of the herbal formula balance each other and undergo a mutual synergy increasing efficacy and enhancing safety.

All Chinese herbs, once ingested and metabolised, have a natural affinity to a particular organ, bodily system or "meridian" (energy line), as the Chinese say. For example, Chinese remedies used for liver ailments have a natural affinity towards the meridian associated with the liver. When the medicine is broken down in the human body, its energy enters the liver meridian, and in this manner its therapeutic effects are carried into the liver. Chinese herbal medicine can be beneficial for a variety of medical conditions ranging from gastrointestinal illnesses and infertility to psychological disorders. In addition, herbs sometimes can be administered as supplements. For example, the popular Ginseng herb has been known to help increase energy and enhance physical performance.



## Acupuncture

According to Taoist philosophy and holism, since energy imbalance is regarded as the foremost cause of disease, direct manipulation of energy naturally is the foremost cure. Acupuncture involves inserting needles into energy points on the skin to improve and balance the flow of energy, inducing healing. Acupuncture points are believed to stimulate the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord) to release chemicals into the muscles, spinal cord, and brain. These chemicals either change the experience of pain or release other chemicals, such as hormones, that influence the body's self-regulating systems.

The biochemical changes stimulate the body's natural healing abilities and promote physical and emotional well-being. Acupuncture restores normal energy currents that damaged tissues need to regenerate, and this in turn enables the body's natural defences to do their job to dissolve and eliminate toxic cells and re-establish natural cellular activity in the affected tissue. Acupuncture has been used with other holistic therapies, and of course proper diet and exercise, to help cure diseases such as cancer, as well as to help stop smoking or to lose weight.



## Massage

Massage means interaction. Whenever we touch the body, changes will occur both physically and emotionally. Not only will the particular part touched be affected, but also the whole body and all the senses will respond. Therapeutic massage has been used since the earliest times by Taoists to relieve fatigue, restore circulation, balance Yin and Yang energies, stimulate organs and glands, and tone muscles and ligaments. There are various therapeutic massages all of which involve stimulating energy points to provide a total physical and mental healing effect.

Acupressure is one form of ancient Chinese massage which employs deep digital stimulation to vital points along the energy meridians to accomplish similar effects as acupuncture. Regular therapeutic massage is also useful as a preventive form of treatment as it increases the production of white blood cells and antibodies providing more resistance against viruses and diseases.

As with any holistic approach to health and well being, the healing effects of these Taoist therapeutic treatments cannot be achieved without proper nutrition and exercise, and most importantly, breathing. Natural foods, anything that comes from nature and is not processed, nourish the body while processed and refined foods, canned goods, sugar and white flour toxify the body, which ultimately leads to ill-health.



However, while dietary nutrition cannot be ignored, the nutrition provided by air through breathing is more vital to health and longevity. Breathing cleanses and energises the body and different breathing exercises focus on these aspects.

'Cleansing breath' stresses exhalation and detoxifies the body while 'energising breath' emphasises inhalation and collects and stores vital energy. Martial arts, specifically tai chi and kung fu, (and yoga), combine breathing and physical movement. By cultivating "chi" through correct breathing and circulating it through the body and mind with soft rhythmic exercises, you can cure yourself by generating the energy required by the body for healing.

True to the philosophy underlying holistic health, Taoist healing focuses on health and not disease and in its literal translation it truly is a "way" of life.

