

Health

MORE AUSTRALIAN

women are turning to the humble herb when they feel unwell. It's a trend that your average local doctor is likely to chuckle about or choke on. But business for Sydney and Melbourne's purveyors of Chinese herbs is booming and women who talked to FOLLOW ME said their health showed remarkable improvements. Several have reported that gynaecological problems cleared up, one recovered from a kidney and bladder infection, another was "cured" of a debilitating yeast allergy while a third found she was pregnant after having her pulse taken.

Today, few people know that the juice of fresh ginger settles upset stomachs (just several drops in a glass of water) even

though many of our great-grandmothers used the remedy. Few doctors are likely to recommend such treatment and yet 60 years ago 90 per cent of Western medicine was based on herbs.

Lily Jiang Liu, a Medical Science graduate from Beijing University, often recommends it to patients when they visit her surgery in Sydney's Chinatown. "It's the best all-round herb for the stomach," she says. Ginger, however, has other curative properties. Dried, it warms the lungs and dissolves mucus. Roasted, it helps diarrhoea while charcoal ginger is recommended for menstrual problems.

China and its 1.2 billion people still rely on herbal medicine. It was flourishing there 300 years before the birth of

YIN, YANG AND A PINCH OF GINGER



BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
LOTUS LEAVES (LIAN YE) WITH
IUO HAN GUO BERRIES;
GINSENG TUBER; DUAN SHEN

Christ — that's nearly 2000 years before today's Western medicine began to evolve.

Lily studied Chinese medicine, including herbalism and acupuncture, for six years. She stresses that it is as complex as ours in the West.

A Chinese herbalist takes time and care diagnosing your problem. As in the West, the state of the tongue, eyes, complexion and expression are important. And so is the pulse. Lily, however, checks six of them — three on each wrist. Taking these allows her to monitor the energy (*Qi*) of your vital organs. On the inside of the left wrist, she can check the energy of your heart and liver. On the right, the spleen and lungs. The kidneys have a pulse on each wrist — deep energy is monitored on the left and superficial energy on the right.

These energies should be in balance. For example, if your kidneys' deep energy is low and your superficial energy is high, you're likely to feel continually

ON THE WOODEN PALETTE,
FROM THE TOP: IUO HAN GUO
BERRIES; GINSENG LEAVES;
GINSENG TUBER. IN THE
DRAWER ARE GINSENG ROOTS,
DRIED SEAHORSES (HAT MA),
DRIED GINGER AND DANG SHEN



tired and debilitated with occasional bursts of liveliness. Overall, these energies reflect the state of your individual organs which, in turn, reflect your overall health — the balance between the Yin and Yang.

On average Lily sees between 16 and 20 patients a day. She charges \$25 for a half-hour consultation, but this can be less, depending on the patient.

"Very few of them are Chinese and the majority are women," says Lily, who operates from a closet-sized surgery at the back of a Chinese herb dispenser in central Sydney. As patients wait outside the consultation room, several Chinese men select different leaves, roots, pieces of bark, stems or tubers from a battery of drawers behind the counter, according to what's written on the prescription.



SEAHORSES (HAT MA) AND HUANG



promoting Yin. Also beneficial to Yin are sour-tasting herbs (for the liver) and salty ones which purge the kidneys. Yang-promoting herbs taste sweet (for the spleen) and pungent (for the lung). There is also a group of bland and tasteless drugs, including pearl barley, that "clean internal damp", which are used as diuretics.

Weekly consultations are advised initially. This allows the herbalist to monitor progress and the body's reaction to the prescribed drugs. Patients take home a packet of prescribed herbs that they have to boil up daily. One patient reported that this proved quite a chore. "Every morning I'd have to get up an hour and a half earlier to boil these herbs until they had reduced to a broth. They tasted disgusting."

Chinese medicine does not appear to work as quickly as the synthetic drugs of the West. "This is because they don't concentrate on the symptoms, as Western medicine does, but work from the internal organs outwards," says Lily. Persistence is essential as herbal remedies take time to get to the core of the problem.

Besides the curative powers of the herbs, Chinese medicine uses the body's pulses to diagnose conditions such as pregnancy. One of her patients reported that her pregnancy diagnosis by Lily was later supported by blood tests from a hospital. "It was amazing how sure she was," says the patient. "She said there was no question about it. My doctor

couldn't be sure until the blood tests came back."

After consulting four doctors, a 38-year-old patient was told the only way to stop her recurring kidney and bladder infection was prolonged use of powerful antibiotics. "After three months on Lily's herbs, it had cleared," says the woman. "After every consultation she changed some of the herbs as my condition improved. What also impressed me was that she knew what state my liver and spleen were in after taking my pulses. It matched what the doctors had told me but they used X-rays, blood tests and other probes."

A 26-year-old woman turned to Chinese herbs when the only course of action open to her after a painful inflammation of the uterus was a surgical problem. "I wanted to have a less brutal option than surgery, so I took Lily's herbs three times a day. The inflammation and pain went within weeks."

Sino-American studies at the Nan Kai Hospital in Tianjin have shown that many traditional herbal treatments are effective. Sweet wormwood, used in China more than a thousand years ago for chills and fevers, has been found to be an effective treatment for malaria. Red sage, prescribed for chest pain and heart-related problems, has been shown to lead to "remarkable improvements" in patients suffering from angina. Not only have clinical trials shown that it acts as an anti-thrombotic but it

also increases coronary blood flow. Other traditional herbal remedies have been found to help in the treatment of asthma, hepatitis, ulcers, appendicitis, hypothermia, internal bleeding and renal hypertension.


Chinese researchers are developing treatments that use the most effective combination of their traditional remedies and Western medical procedures. This marriage has led to spectacular breakthroughs in the treatments of peptic ulcers and other abdominal diseases. Why are the Western multinational drug companies so slow to



research and market medicines that have been shown to be effective? It's quite simple. A plant and its curative properties cannot be patented. Synthetic drugs can. ●

MIKE DOLAN

Lily Jiang Liu holds surgeries on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 334 Crown Street, Darlinghurst 2010, Sydney. Tel: (02) 360 1656. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays she can be found at 75 Ultimo Road, Haymarket 2000, Sydney. Tel: (02) 212 4397.



Broadly speaking the traditional herbs are categorised as having four effects: cold (*han*), hot (*juh*), warm (*wen*) and cool (*liang*). Herbs used to treat fevers fall into the cold or coolness category and hence the cooling nature of dandelion tea is used for inflamed throats associated with thirst and fever. A patient with a cold, chills and headache will be given ginger with its warming qualities.

When the patient takes the prescribed herbs, says Lily, the practitioner carefully monitors the body's reaction. How the body and its energies react to the herbs tells the doctor more about the patient's condition and how to proceed with further treatment.

"Many Australian women who come here have problems with their liver. This is very important for women as it is the seat of the emotions," says Lily. "Their diets are deficient and their irregular lifestyles give them a Yin deficiency." Lily says this leads to gynaecological problems, liver stagnation and period pains.

Drugs are categorised into tastes: sour, bitter, sweet, pungent and salty. Bitter herbs reduce body temperature and fever, and work on the heart,