



Searles Wellness

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Bladder problems and western and eastern longevity issues

Bladder problems can seriously disrupt life by causing embarrassing interruptions in normal social activities. Very common among older women, it is reported one-third of women over 65 experience some degree of urinary problems, 12% reporting daily urine leakage. Urinary incontinence is less prevalent in men, but can be related to prostate problems.

Dysfunctional Bladder from the Western Point of View

Several body systems must work together to control the bladder. The pelvic floor muscles hold the bladder in place. Sphincter muscles keep the urethra closed. Bladder muscle relaxes when filled with urine and squeeze during urination. Nerves carry signals from the bladder to let the brain know when the bladder is full, or it's time to urinate. Hormones help keep the bladder lining and urethra healthy (in women).

Many secondary factors can make a small problem worse. These may include: chronic constipation, obesity, diuretic medications, chronic cough, surgery, pregnancy, or an enlarged prostate for men. Other serious causes can be neurological conditions such as stroke, Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinson's disease.

Diagnostic procedures could include a basic urinalysis, STD checks, blood tests for diabetes a pap/ pelvic examination for women, prostate exams and PSA blood test for men.

Western treatment modalities include new bladder medications which target nerves to control smooth muscles of the bladder or enhance sphincter muscle contracture, or both, reducing symptoms of bladder instability, urgency, frequency and urge incontinence. Unfortunately, these medications can also have side effects such a dry mouth and sedation, confusion, nausea etc.

Hormones applied externally or taken orally can help urethral health and strengthen the lining of the bladder in hormone deficient women. Pessaries are often prescribed to hold the uterus in position or surgery is recommended to help with a prolapsed uterus. In men, prostate health might include medications or herbs to shrink BPH (Benign Prostate Hypertrophy).

Some tips for better bladder control is to avoid tobacco consumption in any form as well as excessive intake of bladder irritants such as high citrus, sugary, carbonated, caffeinated and alcoholic beverages. The normalization of bowel function with adequate fiber, stool softeners, osmotic laxatives, digestive enzymes, and probiotics may be helpful. Weight loss for those significantly overweight can help reduce leakage.

Strengthening the pelvic floor and abdominal muscle using Kegel exercises to isolate the muscles is a good practice. Daily walking, stair climbing, dancing, yoga, swimming, pool aerobics, boxing, weight lifting, exercise class should be done as often as feasible.

Biofeedback systems to assist the mind-body connection can retrain affected dysfunctional muscles of the pelvic floor. Amazing improvements can be achieved with repetitious practice over the long term.

Complementary and Alternative Medicine Approaches (CAM) to the Dysfunctional Bladder

Modern day Western Medical approaches can be combined with CAM approaches to maximize successful outcomes. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), homeopathy, dietary therapies, Western Herbal treatments, Ayurvedic Herbal and nutritional supplement therapies are examples of modalities which may offer help. Even though my expertise is in TCM and Western Medicine, I marvel at the variety of treatments my clients have utilized with success. I've learned not to discount the healing potential of many CAM modalities.

I approach each client's bladder problem as having an impact on their health, lifestyle, ability to exercise, emotional state, diet and sexual activity. In TCM evaluation, the pulse and abdomen palpation provide a diagnostic means of observing the flow of energy between the organ systems. The examination of the tongue includes looking at the thickness, color, consistency of coating. The color, the health of the skin, the distribution of pigmentation also is significant in reading patterns of organ dysfunction.

The descriptions of the "Organs in Chinese Medicine" are not limited to functional activities we associate with Western Medicine. In TCM, the kidneys are said to "govern water." Just like in Western medicine, the kidneys filter out the urine, but unlike Western medicine, Kidney Qi (energy) also contributes to the ability to hold urine in the bladder and additionally to hold vitality in the body.

As we age, Kidney Qi weakens gradually, just like a battery. Like a car, the "internal battery" needs to be "recharged" to maintain its power. Our ability to boost our Qi on a daily basis is a key to health.

The role of a skillful TCM practitioner is to determine how to stop the decline and reverse the pattern to enhance overall vitality and healthy longevity. Selected acupuncture points specific to where the problem stems from can be stimulated with pressure, cupping, massage, topical herbal patches, warming moxabustion, and

electrical stimulation or needling to reduce stagnation or to stimulate more vitality.

I recommend daily recharging the kidney energy with “Qi Gong” energy awareness exercises. Herbal products taken orally are particularly helpful at getting to the root of the imbalance in the system. Often the herbal therapy taken for 6-12 weeks is the key to reduction in symptoms. Once an imbalance is corrected, the problem should be resolved and herbs may be stopped.

Successful treatment should increase one’s ability to hold urination, decrease the number of times one urinates at night, decrease urinary urgency, create a smoother urine flow and sometimes improve sexual function. Treatment is usually once or twice a week with acupuncture and a treatment series is usually 8 -10 sessions. If Western pharmaceuticals are being used and you decide to combine the two practices, perhaps the dosages or frequency of taking the medications can be reduced or stopped. Most important is the boost to overall vitality, sexuality and general health.

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