

ask the experts

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Keep your respiratory system strong

Poor lung health will affect other parts of your body and can lead to fatigue, asthma and even constipation, says TCM physician Lee Teck Chaw

Breathing happens so naturally that we do not think about how it works unless something bad or serious occurs.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of respiratory health, as the virus affects the lungs and throat.

The respiratory system comprises the nose, throat, mouth, all the way down to the lungs.

Apart from the highly infectious virus, there are many other conditions that affect the respiratory system in some way, chief being lung cancer.

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths worldwide. In Singapore, it is the third-most common form among men and women, according to the Singapore Cancer Registry Annual Report 2018.

Other common conditions include asthma, lung infections such as pneumonia, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Here, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) physician Lee Teck Chaw from Chang Le TCM Wellness Clinic answers key questions on why maintaining a healthy respiratory system ensures the overall function of the body.

Q Why is having a strong respiratory system important?

Having a strong respiratory system will benefit other parts of your body.

In TCM, there is strong emphasis on the relationship between various organs. The lungs inhale and exhale *qi*, known as the life force of the body, while the kidneys are the root of *qi*.

Inhaled *qi* from the lungs will flow down to the kidneys. Thus, having a healthy kidney is also important as it regulates the flow of this life force, creating a balance in the body.

In a weak respiratory system, oxygen intake drops while heart rate increases. This makes the body feel more tired easily and may lead to difficulty in performing daily tasks.

Moreover, our respiratory system functions like an ecosystem within our body. If it fails, it will affect the transport and distribution of water around the body. The skin will become dehydrated, and you may urinate frequently at night or produce hard stools.

Q What are some lifestyle habits or activities that could lead to respiratory problems?

Smoking, drinking alcohol and not exercising could all lead to respiratory problems.

When cooking, ensure that you have proper grease filters installed in your cooker hood as the lack of them may affect the respiratory system in the long term.

The growing popularity of aromatic therapy may also affect the respiratory system if you use unsuitable products that may damage the lungs. Go for quality products and do your research before you buy them.

In TCM, it is believed that negative emotions such as grief and anger, when not kept in check, will upset the balance of energy in the body and rob the energy of our respiratory system, leading to breathing difficulties, hyperventilation or even asthma attacks.

It is helpful to learn to manage our emotions to maintain our wellbeing.

Q What are some common symptoms of possible respiratory problems?

Common symptoms include cough, sinusitis, excess phlegm, shortness of breath, asthma, poor skin condition, water retention, night



Having a strong respiratory system will benefit other parts of the body. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

urine and constipation.

According to TCM practice, the energy of the lungs extends to other areas of the body such as the skin and bladder. Hence, if the skin and bladder are affected, it is a sign that you may have respiratory problems.

Q What are some healthy habits recommended to maintain a healthy respiratory system?

• Exercise regularly

Try exercises such as *taiji* and *qigong*. Both involve breathing techniques and focus on slow movements, which may also support mental wellbeing.

• Adopt a positive mindset

Meditation and breathing exercises can calm the mind.

• Do not smoke

Smoking is a leading cause of lung cancer, as well as other cancers and diseases such as heart disease, stroke and bronchitis.

• Avoid exposure to pollutants

A recent study by Nanyang Technological University found that air pollution was linked to an increase in a type of lung cancer known as lung adenocarcinoma.

• Maintain a healthy diet.

In TCM, the colour white is associated with

lung function, so any fruit or vegetable that is white is said to be able to support the organ. Think white rice, lily bulbs, pears, almonds and ginkgo – do note, however, that almonds and ginkgo are mildly toxic.

Another type of food to support the respiratory system is cordyceps, which helps boost the energy of the lungs and kidneys. Both organs play a vital role in the respiratory system as the energy of the lungs is carried to the kidneys.

Cordyceps can also help boost energy and stamina, as well as nourish the body.

Traditionally, it has also been used to treat asthma and support those with a weak body constitution. But for those with any underlying medical issues, please seek medical advice before consuming cordyceps.

While it is generally safe for short-term use, some possible side effects include a stomachache, nausea, constipation, diarrhoea or dry mouth. Also, cordyceps should not be consumed in large quantities. After all, the objective is to seek balance within the body.

Borsch Med 100% Cordyceps Sinensis Powder Capsule is available at www.borschmed.com as well as selected pharmacies and online platforms.



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