



# Diabetes

Although this is mainly about Type 2 Diabetes most of the information is also relevant for Type 1 Diabetes. Type 2 Diabetes is a condition where the pancreas does not produce enough insulin to regulate blood sugar levels. Type 1 Diabetes is where the pancreas produces none at all. Type 2 Diabetes is usually diagnosed when there are high levels of glucose or sugar in the blood for a prolonged period of time. It is often strongly related to diet and lifestyle.

## Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspective (TCM)

### Damp Heat

*Damp Heat* is a common TCM body pattern for people diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes. The *damp* aspect represents retained fluid and mucous in the body due to the intake of excessive raw, cold and greasy foods. This mucous or obstruction is then congealed and exacerbated by heat in the body which is caused by spicy food, alcohol or stress. Symptoms of *Damp Heat* include: thirst, hunger, frequent urination, fatigue, weight gain and dizziness. In addition to this, a thick yellow coating will be present on the tongue and the complexion will be quite pale.

### Qi Deficiency

Qi Deficiency is another common TCM body pattern for diabetes. The deficiency can be caused by an excessive lifestyle, emotional trauma or simply by day-to-day stress. Managing stress is an important aspect of controlling diabetes and its symptoms. Stress releases the hormones adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones are designed to raise blood sugar levels to cope with stressful situations. If these stress hormones are released over a prolonged period, blood sugar levels will be higher - potentially creating Type 2 Diabetes - and the body will fatigue and its Qi will become weak and deficient. When someone presents with both Damp Heat and Qi Deficiency it is the perfect recipe for Type 2 Diabetes to manifest.

### Treatment and Management

Western medicine treatments such as insulin may be necessary to treat Type 2 Diabetes. TCM can offer treatments which will prevent the need for or minimize the amount of Western medication used.

A holistic TCM approach will include:

- **Moderate regular exercise:** Cycling, tai chi, swimming and walking will all reduce stress and promote the flow of Qi.
- **Chinese herbal medicine** will clear the damp heat in the body, promoting a healthy digestive system, regulating absorption and elimination. Herbs such as astragalus and ginseng will tonify the body preventing Qi deficiency.
- **Acupuncture** can reduce the impact of stress on the body. Acupuncture points can be used to calm the impact of stress hormones and regulate the amount of insulin released.
- **Diet and nutrition** is crucial to ensure the body is not predisposed to developing Type 2 Diabetes or in managing the condition.

Chinese Medicine diet advice includes:

- Avoid sugary refined foods, rich fatty foods and refined carbohydrates which have a high glycemic index, such as white bread and pasta.
- Raw, cold food or excessive dairy will create dampness in the body. To avoid this obstruction meals should be cooked. Slow cooked casseroles or soups are best, otherwise lightly poaching or stir frying.
- Cooking with **barley, mushroom, ginger and garlic** in the winter months will help clear damp and mucous.
- Avoid excessive spicy food and alcohol, which cause internal heat and can result in damp heat manifesting in the body.
- In China, **bitter melon** is a vegetable which has been tested and prescribed for Type 2 Diabetes. Bitter Melon can be used in dishes such as congees or stir fries.
- **Bojenmi Tea** (available at my clinic in loose leaf or tea bags) is a pleasant tea used as a digestion tonic. It assists with weight reduction and fluid absorption thereby promoting healthy blood sugar levels.