

## **TCM 5 Branches Sidebar**

**Maggie Jacobus**

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“Live long and die young” was the motto of the ancients who developed the Chinese medical system. Over centuries a number of systems were devised to continually calibrate the balance between *yin* and *yang*—the complementary opposites that are the two sides of any whole—so that the body’s animating life force—*chi* or *qi*—can flow freely and optimum health can thus be maintained for as long as the human body can live.

This medical system is known today as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and includes five branches: acupuncture, massage, herbal medicine, dietetics and energy exercises.

### **Acupuncture**

Probably the most widely recognized form of TCM, acupuncture made its Western debut when a New York Times reporter on assignment in China in 1971 had to have an emergency appendectomy and received acupuncture for post-surgical pain. The front-page stories he sent home reported, “I’ve seen the past, and it works!”

Acupuncture uses disposable, flexible, stainless steel needles about three inches long and just three times the size of a strand of hair. Inserting them at any of the 365 principal points or 300 secondary points along the meridian pathways through which vital life force flows is thought to unblock stagnant *qi*. When *qi* is flowing freely, *yin* and *yang* come into balance and optimum health results.

### **Herbal Medicine**

Often used in conjunction with acupuncture, Chinese herbs are used for a variety of reasons: as medicine for a specific ailment or condition, as a supplement to prevent disease and aid health, and to strengthen and tone the bodily systems. As with the other systems of TCM, herbs are used to correct imbalances of *yin* and *yang*.

Like acupuncture with its hundreds of points, Chinese herbs can be combined into myriad different formulas, providing a seemingly infinite number of treatment options for the TCM diagnosis. This customization creates herbal treatments that fit exactly the individual patient’s needs and can address numerous issues with just one formula. This is different from the one-size-fits-all approach of Western drugs, which offers just a handful of drug options to treat all people who are diagnosed with the same single condition, regardless of the fact that no two people are exactly the same. If a person has more than one condition in Western medicine, then more than one drug is taken.

### **Dietetics**

Diet is integral to the health of the body and food is used as a therapy to keep the body in harmony. Like everything from the Chinese viewpoint, foods have either *yin* or *yang*

properties and thus *yin* imbalances can be addressed by eating *yang* type foods and vice versa. Chinese medicine also emphasizes eating with the seasons and eating “only food,” meaning that such things are artificial additives, chemicals and heavily processed foods are not items the body was designed to consume and therefore should be avoided.

### **Massage**

The Chinese style of massage called *Tui Na* (“twee nah”) is an intense therapeutic form of bodywork not for the faint of heart. Influenced by acupressure, many of the hand techniques involve vigorous and deep rolling, pinching and pressing on specific energy points and meridians as well as some realigning manipulations all in the name of optimal *qi* flow. For a deep muscle release, the *tui na* therapist may walk on the patient’s back or sacral area.

### **Energy Exercise**

*Qi gong* translates as energy or life force cultivation. Using conscious breathing, movement and meditation, *qi gong* exercises enhance and regenerate energy. A popular form of energy exercise is *tai chi* (also known as *t’ai chi ch’uan* or *tai ji*). This martial *qi gong* is a “slow, graceful Chinese exercise that teaches relaxation skills, mental focus and physical alignment while building leg strength, endurance and stability,” according to certified Milwaukee *tai chi* and *qi gong* instructor Patricia Culotti.

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