

Polycystic Kidney Disease and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) views the human body as a dynamic system of functions. This is very different from the mechanical view of the human body as seen by western biomedical medicine. The result is that TCM provides a very different perspective on how the human body functions and how to address disfunction in regards to improving health.

In the case of Polycystic Kidney disease (PKD), TCM provides a unique perspective of how to understand PKD and the affect it has on the person who carries this condition. TCM can provide the patient with answers as to why certain changes happen with the progression of PKD and understand what can be done about it.

The first step is to understand the thinking that forms the basis of TCM. All medicine relies on diagnostic definitions. For example when someone has what is defined as being depression, they are prescribed an antidepressant. Likewise TCM (and other traditional medical systems) have ways of defining the function of the body based the signs and symptoms presented by the patient. The treatments in TCM (acupuncture, herbs and other modalities) are determined by this diagnostic system.

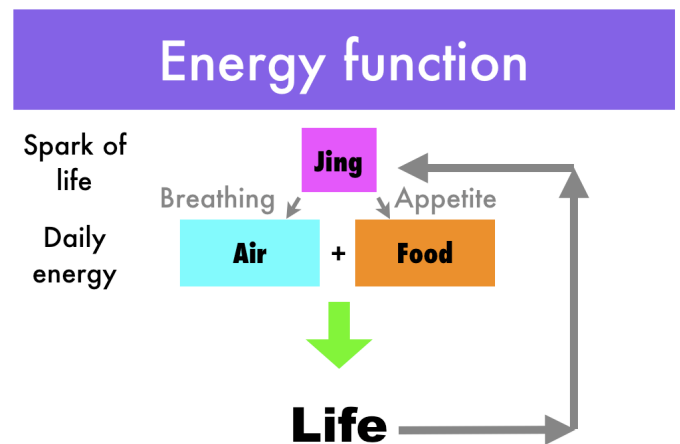
The basic understanding in TCM is that the human body is a balance of functions. Heat balancing cold, movement balancing stillness, et cetera. The organ systems of the body are seen as having dynamic functions within the body over and above what is understood in standard medical anatomy. There are connections between the physical structures of the body and the subtle emotional and energy nature of the body.

In TCM the Kidney is seen as regulating the function of water/fluids in the body. It is also considered the storehouse of Jing energy. Jing is the spark of life that we inherit from our parents. Thus it is the function of the Kidney to regulate the use of Jing, or more specifically manage growth, reproduction and aging. All the functions of growth, bones, fertility, and libido, are tied to the function of the Kidney, as well as fear and will power. This is most easily seen in the tendency to urinate when frightened.

When Kidneys are chronically stressed there is a corresponding rise in signs that the body is aging more quickly. This can manifest in grey hair, urinary incontinence, ringing in the ears or hearing loss, increased anxiety (fear) and lack of will power. This is most visibly seen in people who survive a severe accident or live a hard party lifestyle of too much sex and recreational drugs. These people often appear to be aging at an unusually fast rate. From a TCM point of view they have tapped into the Jing energy reserved for their future and have essentially aged faster.

For the person who has PKD, the structural problems of the kidney from birth, results in a mismanagement of the Jing energy of life. The PKD patient has essentially kidneys that are aging faster than they should. The result is that many signs of aging and even the feeling of being old, occur much earlier than would be expected. The aging process happens in all people, it just happens more quickly and can accelerate more quickly in the PKD patient.

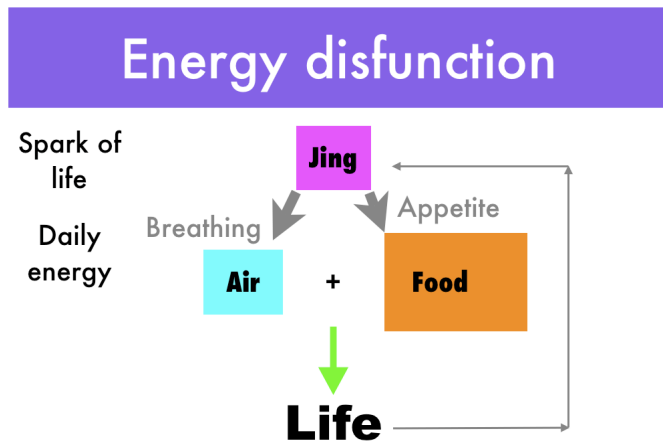
The process of life utilizes the energy of life (jing) to draw in air and provide an appetite for food. Food and air combine to drive daily functions and then provide some nourishment back to support the Jing energy. The quality of this process determines health.



If the process is not managed well, tissues are not repaired well, resulting in weight gain, and sagging tissues. This leads to increased herniations and cyst formation. The increase in cyst formation, specifically in the Kidneys,

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results in further disruption of Jing energy management, accelerating the process of aging by decreasing the amount of energy the body returns to nourish the Jing energy of the Kidney.



The treatment of the PKD patient comes down to slowing the progression of the energy deficiency spiral that speeds the process of aging. In many ways the advice for the PKD patient is the same for anyone who wants to live a long healthy life. The difference is that the PKD patient has to be very vigilant and develop a lifestyle that really supports life. The PKD patient has very little room for error, because they are more quickly affected by bad health decisions compared to the population as a whole.

Acupuncture and prescribed herbal formulas specific to the needs of the patient can help stabilize the management functions of the body. Over time this can slow the progression of PKD and improve the quality of life for the patient. The most important component to treatment, is for the PKD patient to make lifestyle choices that support the body functions and decrease factors that negatively affect the management of Jing energy.

Recommendations for the person with PKD:

- **Structure your life to reduce the stress of fear.** Surround yourself with people whom you trust and situations that make you feel safe and comfortable.
- **Add daily aerobic exercise.** Do not over-train and push yourself to exhaustion. Exercise in fun ways that are enjoyable to you.
- **Eat foods close to the source.** Jing is most nourished by seeds, nuts, eggs and food that is “just picked” fresh. Be aware of nutrient concerns specific to your level of kidney function (see [book “Brilliant Eats”](#))
- **Eat in ways that support the digestion.** Easy to digest foods (soup-like foods, simple cooked whole grains, bright colored steamed vegetables) help the body function as efficiently as possible and decrease the sagging of tissues and cyst formation. (See [Eating Healthy article](#))
- **Surround yourself with people who are full of life.** Happy, fun, youthful thinking people nourish your internal source of life energy. They can help keep you young.
- **Find will power.** If you lack the will power to make positive changes to lifestyle and stick with them, enlist a spouse or friend to be your will power. Encourage them to help keep you on track.
- **Seek out a qualified acupuncturist and herbalist** to help you find treatments that are specific to you and your situation. (find one at [NCCAOM.org](#))

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[Diseases of the Kidney and Bladder](#), Li,Wei, David Frierman.

Blue Poppy, Boulder CO. c2006