

Adjusting to Change—Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Perspective

BODY & SOUL

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Have you just moved to Shanghai and your body does not yet feel quite comfortable in your new environment? If so, read the following thoughts with an open and calm mind.

Relocating to a new continent, a new country or even a new city is an enormous change for a person and his family. While it can be exciting to experience a new culture and lifestyle, it can also be overwhelming to be confronted with so many simultaneous changes and demands. Expatriates often suffer from feeling emotionally unwell after moving to their new environment. Typical psychological symptoms associated with change are being light-headed, nervous, restless, moody and impatient. In terms of the physical ailments, some people suffer from minor symptoms such as irregular bowel movements, stomach pain, diarrhea or constipation, loss of appetite, nausea, itchy skin, eczema, sleeping problems,

and fatigue. Children often complain about many ailments and may need a bit of extra attention during this transitional period.

Keeping in mind how difficult a move can be, we advise that you integrate yourself and your family into your new environment slowly – step by step. Second, determine what makes everyone feel safe and relaxed and with this in mind, establish certain routines or rituals. For example, children often respond well to established mealtimes. These two steps can allow for a gradual adaptation to one's new physical and emotional environment.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the occurrence of altering symptoms during the process of adaptation can be summarized under a single medical condition that is called “*Shui Tu Bu Fu*” (水土不服). This term liter-

ally means that water and earth do not fit together or that the body has not yet adjusted to the new water and earth system.

The ancient Chinese understood that a phase of adaptation has to be achieved before one can feel safe and comfortable in a new environment. In general, health is always related to a person's environment, and many external factors can influence one's personal wellbeing. For example, after moving from a home in a low-altitude area to a home in the mountains, a person might suffer from altitude sickness due to the thin air, low air pressure, and climate change. Or if a person moves from a rural to an urban area, the unanticipated exposure to noise, light and other stimuli can overwhelm the mind, causing the body to react negatively. In the latter case, gastrointestinal, respiratory or psychological symptoms can be observed.

According to TCM, a healthy and functioning digestive and respiratory system, as well as strong kidneys can



significantly help a person adapt to a new environment. The health of every organ system strongly depends on the flow of Qi energy (life energy) throughout the organ. However, the kidneys and the digestive system play an essential role in the circulation since they not only store but also generate new energy. First, there is the original, pre-heaven energy, also called the body's constitution, which is stored in the kidneys. A baby receives this from his parents at birth and it is consumed during one's life. Some activities - such as working late at night - not only consume a disproportionate amount of energy but also deny the body an opportunity to rest and rebuild energy sources. Second, there is

a post-heaven Qi energy that can be ensured by consuming healthy foods since the energy is obtained and stored in the digestive system. The digestive system supplies the other organs with Qi energy that protects the body from *evil intruders* that can cause diseases, such as severe weather conditions (e.g. wind, cold, heat, humidity and dryness).

On the other hand, the body's skin is called the outer lungs and belongs to the respiratory organ system. With the help of the protective Qi (referred to as immune system in Western Medicine) that is flowing beneath the skin, the skin shields the body from outside influences. During your first few months in a new environment unknown disease-

