

## **SAFE AND EFFECTIVE TREATMENTS FOR THYROID DISORDERS**

One year ago, a young lady came to our clinic complaining of tiredness, indigestion, and irregular periods. Her regular doctor, an internist, could not find anything structurally wrong with her. She went to several different hospitals for consultation or treatment. They treated her without success. Finally, someone suggested that she seek help from Chinese medicine, and she came to us as a "last resort." We took her health history, asked about her life style and eating habits, and looked at her doctors' test results. We also looked at her tongue and read her pulse.

Her tongue was very red, with no coating, and her pulse was deep, thin, and rapid. In Chinese medicine terms, these are obvious signs of a severe Yin deficiency. In Western terms, I followed a treatment strategy for hyperthyroidism. We prescribed acupuncture treatments and herbal medicine, as well as dietary changes. All of her symptoms slowly normalized.

Thyroid problems seem to be more prevalent these days, but this could be because more people are being tested, and the tests themselves are better at detecting irregularities. There are two main thyroid disorders: hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism. Hyperthyroidism is a condition in which the thyroid gland is overactive and produces too much thyroid hormone. Typical symptoms of hyperthyroidism include: high blood pressure; fast heartbeat; moist skin; increased sweating; tremor; nervousness; increased appetite with weight loss; diarrhea and/or frequent bowel movements; weakness; eyes that seem to bulge out of their sockets; and sensitivity of the eyes to light. Hypothyroidism is a condition in which the thyroid gland is under-active and produces too little thyroid hormone. Typical symptoms of hypothyroidism include: hoarse voice; slowed speech; puffy face; drooping eyelids; intolerance of cold conditions; constipation; weight gain; dry hair; dry skin; and depression.

### **Thyroid Disorders in Chinese Medicine**

In traditional Chinese medicine, both hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism are considered to be a Yin/Yang imbalance. In Chinese philosophical and medical theory, Yin and Yang are the essential components of the material universe. Everything that exists is Yin or Yang (generally a combination of both in a characteristic balance). The Yin principle is dark, moist, receptive, female, sinking, and its electrical charge is negative. The Yang principle is light, fiery, active, male, outward-expanding, and its electrical charge is positive. A very basic principle of Chinese medicine is to keep the Yin and Yang in balance, since the balance of Yin and Yang represents the healthy state of the body. A treatment intervention by traditional Chinese medicine (which includes acupuncture, herbal

medicine, and dietary therapy) is designed to bring the Yin and Yang back to a normal balance. In Western terms, an overproduction or underproduction of thyroid hormone alters the body's chemical balance and causes hyper- or hypothyroidism. In Chinese terms, when Yin is deficient it cannot control the Yang energy from escaping outward and upward, and this "reckless" movement of Yang brings about the characteristic symptoms of hyperthyroidism. When Yang is deficient, it simply cannot produce the vital energy necessary to keep the body functioning well, and symptoms of hypothyroidism result.