

What Are The Seven Emotions?

Suwen (The Book of Plain Questions) says "The **five yin-organs** of the human body produce five kinds of essential **qi**, which bring forth joy, anger, grief, worry, and fear." TCM also believes that certain organs are related to emotional activities, i.e. the **heart is related to joy**, the **liver to anger**, the **spleen to pensiveness**, the **lungs to anxiety** and the **kidneys to fear**.

The emotions are considered the major internal causes of disease in TCM. Emotional activity is seen as a normal, internal, physiological response to stimuli from the external environment. Within normal limits, emotions cause no disease or weakness in the body. However, when emotions become so powerful that they become uncontrollable and overwhelm or possess a person, then they can cause serious injury to the internal organs and open the door to disease. It is not the intensity as much as the prolonged duration or an extreme emotion, which causes damage. While Western physicians tend to stress the psychological aspects of psychosomatic ailments, the pathological damage to the internal organs is very real indeed and is of primary concern of the TCM practitioner.

Excess emotional activity causes severe **yin-yang** energy imbalances, wild aberrations in the flow of **blood, qi (vital energy)** blockages in the **meridians** and impairment of vital **organ** functions. Once physical damage has begun, it is insufficient to eliminate the offending emotion to affect a cure; the prolonged emotional stress will require physical action as well. The emotions represent different human reactions to certain stimuli and do not cause disease under normal conditions.

The Pathogenic Features of the Seven Emotions:

- *Directly impairing organ qi (vital energy)*
- *Affecting the functions of organ qi (vital energy)*
- *Deteriorating effects of emotional instability*

The seven emotions in TCM are:

Joy ❖ Anger ❖ Anxiety ❖ Pensiveness ❖ Grief ❖ Fear ❖ Fright

喜 Joy

"When one is excessively joyful, the spirit scatters and can no longer be stored," states the **Lingshu (The Vital Axis)**. However, in TCM, joy refers to a states of agitation or overexcitement, rather than the more passive notion of deep contentment. The organ most affected is the **heart**. Overstimulation can lead to problems of heart fire connected with such symptoms as feelings of agitation, insomnia and palpitations.



In TCM joy refers to a state of agitation or overexcitement.



Anger could lead to high blood pressure.

怒 Anger

Anger, as described by TCM, covers the full range of associated emotions including resentment, irritability, and frustration. An excess of rich blood makes one prone to anger. Anger will thus affect the liver, resulting in stagnation of liver qi (vital energy). This can lead to liver energy rising to the head, resulting in headaches, dizziness, and other symptoms. In the long run it can result in high blood pressure and can cause problems with the stomach and the spleen. It is commonly observed that ruddy, "full-blooded" people with flushed faces are more prone than others to sudden fits of rage at the slightest provocation.

憂 Anxiety

"When one feels anxiety, the qi (vital energy) is blocked and does not move." Anxiety injures the lungs, which control qi (vital energy) through breathing. Common symptoms of extreme anxiety are retention of breath, shallow, and irregular breathing. The shortage of breath experienced during periods of anxiety is common to everyone. Anxiety also injures the lungs' coupled organ, the large intestine. For example, over-anxious people are prone to ulcerative colitis.



Anxiety can block the qi and manifest in rapid, shallow breathing.



Too much intellectual stimulation can cause pensiveness.

思 Pensiveness

In TCM, pensiveness or concentration is considered to be the result of thinking too much or excessive mental and intellectual stimulation. Any activity that involves a lot of mental effort will run the risk of causing disharmony. The organ most directly at risk is the spleen. This can lead to a deficiency of spleen qi (vital energy), in turn causing worry and resulting in fatigue, lethargy, and inability to concentrate.

悲 Grief

The lungs are more directly involved with this emotion. A normal and healthy expression of grief can be expressed as sobbing that originates in the depths of the lungs - deep breathes and the expulsion of air with the sob. However, grief that remains unresolved and becomes chronic can create disharmony in the lungs, weakening the lung qi (vital energy). This in turn can interfere with the lung's function of circulating qi (vital energy) around the body.



Grief that remains unresolved can create disharmony in the lungs.

恐 Fear

Fear is a normal and adaptive human emotion. But when it becomes chronic and when the perceived cause of the fear cannot be directly addressed, then this is likely to lead to disharmony. The organs most at risk are the **kidneys**. In cases of extreme fright, the kidney's ability to hold qi (vital energy) may be impaired leading to involuntary urination. This can be a particular problem with children.



Fear that cannot be directly addressed is likely to lead to disharmony in the kidneys.



Fright can affect the kidneys if left unchecked.

驚 Fright

Fright is another emotion not specifically related to only one organ. It is distinguished from fear by its sudden, unexpected nature. Fright primarily affects the heart, especially in the initial stages, but if it persists for some time, it becomes conscious fear and moves to the **kidneys**.

Table 3. Excess of Certain Emotions Affects a Particular Yang-organs

Joy	Heart
Fear (Fright)	Kidney
Grief (Anxiety)	Lungs
Pensiveness	Spleen
Anger	Liver