

The Kidney Official

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The Kidney is known as the Official Who Controls the Waterways. In Western medical terms, a major function of the Kidneys is to filter the blood. Every day, a person's kidneys process about 200 liters of blood to sift out about two liters of waste and excess water. The wastes and extra water become urine, which flows to the Bladder, which stores it until it is released through urination. The Kidney controls the body's fluid balance, regulates electrolytes, maintains the acid-base balance and regulates blood pressure by maintaining the salt and water balance.

The Kidney also produces hormones, among them erythropoietin (also known as "EPO"), which controls red blood cell production. Drugs that stimulate EPO production are known for their use as illegal athletic performance-enhancers, as they increase the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood. In the now infamous blood-doping scandals of the cycling world of the 1990s, exogenous EPO was a main ingredient.

The Diagnostics

In Classical Five-Element Acupuncture, assessing odor, color, sound and emotion determines the patient's Causative Factor element (AKA "CF"), the weak link in the system, which will be the focus of the treatment. In the case of a Water CF, in which the Urinary Bladder and Kidney Officials reside, the patient's predominant odor will be putrid - the smell of urine, stagnant water, a fish market, or a sewer. The facial color will be blue - best observed on the skin just lateral to the eyes. The sound of the voice will be groaning - the sound made when one is exhausted, with little in reserve, like an engine sputtering, but pushing onward. The emotion will be an excess or lack of fear. Excess fear manifests as timidity, hesitancy, anxiety, over-vigilance, immobility - frozen in fear, or perhaps rushing around in desperation. Lack of fear often manifests as recklessness, foolhardiness and false bravado.

The Physical Level

In Chinese medicine, this Official is considered the storehouse of the richest and most concentrated ancestral energy, inherited and passed through generations. For basic daily needs, our reserves are replenished by the food we eat and the air we breathe. When we call upon more than basic daily needs (the more superficial), we draw upon this rich, deep, concentrated energy. It provides the endurance, strength and physical stamina needed to carry on, enabling us to get through times of challenge, hardship and adversity.

It is described as being in charge of growth, development, maturation, as well as reproduction, dominantly affecting the secretion of sexual fluids, as well as the sexual drives. It dominates the bones, marrow and teeth, thus affecting the strength of our foundational tissues, production of blood, as well as brain function and memory.

As the Controller of the Waterways, a healthy Kidney removes excess water from the blood and dispatches the right amount of water to every part of the body, enabling us to be fluid and flexible.

An imbalanced Kidney could result in edema, dehydration, stiffness, as well as poisoning of the entire system as its blood cleansing and filtering capabilities fail.

The Mental Level

In our time and culture, more demands are placed on the mind than ever before. The demands of work, especially in a competitive environment, family, scheduling, prioritizing, the onslaught of ever increasing amounts of information to be remembered and processed (with the advent of high technology) are more than the ancient Chinese could have possibly imagined.

The sheer weight carried by the mind can be overwhelming. Without the mental reserves of energy on which to draw, a person, particularly if primarily imbalanced in the Water element, will feel mentally weak, deficient, unclear and forgetful. Having little or no reserves brings forth the emotion associated with the Water element: fear, or its flipside: lack of fear.

Mental reserves include a storehouse of experience, wisdom, knowledge and the energy to call upon those reserves as needed. A full storehouse brings forth security – that whatever happens, we are prepared and will survive. With no reserve to cushion us in hard times, nearly everything is perceived as a threat. Our very will to live and ambition to achieve are compromised. Mentally exhausted, we have little interest in learning, growing or any creative impulse.

The ancient Chinese medical text, the *Nei Ching* speaks of the Kidneys as doing "energetic work," excelling through "ability and cleverness." Water innately fills every hollow, yields to every protrusion, takes the exact shape of whatever contains it, finds its way around any obstacle, assumes many forms, yet is always itself. It responds perfectly to its environment, using the exact amount of energy that is needed. Thus, this element allows us to cleverly and efficiently navigate our daily needs, tasks, and challenges.

Just as the body needs to be clean, flexible and fluid, so does the mind. If the Kidney's filtering system is failing, the mind can become polluted, unclear and stagnant, unable to let go of old stale ideas, toxic concepts, limiting beliefs and identifications. Without the flexibility of mind, we stubbornly hold to narrow points of view. Instead of aging gracefully, expanding in wisdom, becoming elders, we become crystalized curmudgeons.

The Spirit Level

Will, ambition, endurance, and determination are expressions of the Water Element within us, manifesting on the Spirit level, and clearly linked to the state of our reserves. Ambition is the motivation, drive and determination to reach a goal, requiring sufficient reserves to draw upon.

In the case of Water, the physical symptoms arising from either of the Officials will be very similar, as they are so interdependent. It is at the Mental and Spirit levels that we may be able to best diagnose which Official is primarily affected and which is secondary. Though in this system, we support both Officials of the CF Element in every treatment, in considering our choice of points, particularly for their spiritual connotations, it is useful to know which Official is the real source of the trouble.

Thus, after first diagnosing our patient as a Water CF, we may consider, "Is this patient's primary challenge more one of storage and disposal of water (Urinary Bladder) or the filtering, cleansing and dispatching of water (Kidney)?"

When healthy, the Bladder's ability to expand and contract allows for appropriate adaptability, as exemplified by the point UB 54, translated as Equilibrium Middle (AKA 40 in some numbering

systems). Just as Water in Nature effortlessly adapts to the shape of its container and responds, as appropriate, to its environment, e.g., a clear lake, a meandering stream, a raging ocean, a subtle mist, or a frozen glacier, Water provides us an innate ability to adapt, change, and go with the flow. In imbalance, we lose this innate ability. Our reactions become inappropriate, uncontrolled, and can manifest in extremes of being internally frozen and immobilized in fear, or racing about in panic.

When healthy, the Kidney's ability to filter impurities manifest as a mind that is clear and a spirit that is radiant, as exemplified by the point KI 6, translated as Illuminated Sea. When imbalanced, the mind becomes muddled, unclear, cloudy and delusional. The spirit, which is innately pure, seems covered over with murkiness, confusion and misunderstanding. Unlike the age-old metaphor of a mind, clear and still as a tranquil lake - perfectly reflecting what is, unmoving until the correct impulse to act arises, the Kidney Official, in a state of imbalance, is akin to a muddy pool. The Kidney's ability to dispatch vital fluids is compromised, as is the quality of the fluid itself. Rather than pure, clean water being dispatched to every cell, organ, and every level of our being, this toxic mud is spread, incapable of cleansing, refreshing, or invigorating.

The Points

Generally, points selected from the patient's Causative Factor meridians have far greater impact than those from random meridians, though their names may sound tempting. The Causative Factor is considered the source of imbalance in the patient and the root of all the symptoms the patient experiences. Thus, we trust that Nature has provided appropriate points on the patient's Causative Factor meridians to address most of the physical, mental, and spiritual challenges a person of that CF will face. Each of the points on the Kidney meridian brings unique gifts to the body, mind, and spirit of the patient in need. Each point will, in its own way, help to fill reserves, support the flow of fluids, cleanse debris at all levels, and benefit all Officials.

For examples of points on the Kidney meridian, see my article, *The Spirits of the Points: The Kidney Official, Acupuncture Today, September 2012 (Vol. 13, Issue 09)*.

The Questions

The following questions are useful for self-observation and can be appropriately modified to inquire as to the state of a patient's Kidney Official, particularly at the mental and spirit level. It is important to remember that a problem or symptom in this Official does not necessarily make anyone a Water Causative Factor, nor does it mean that the Kidney is the major problem.

Any symptom can come from imbalance in any element, as imbalance spreads from one Official and Element to the next. We determine the source of the trouble, the CF, only through odor, color, sound and emotion. Yet, if you suspect a problem in a patient's Water element and specifically with the Kidney Official, here are some questions to consider in assessing its state:

1. When have you drawn energy from deep reserves within you?
2. How is your long-term memory?
3. When have you felt connected to an inexhaustible energy source?
4. What did you inherit from your mother/father?
5. How are your children like you?
6. When have you felt you had no reserves on which to draw?
7. When have you felt mentally and spiritually clear?
8. When have felt unshakeable?
9. When have you reacted with instinctual immediacy?
10. When have you been able to witness your thoughts without attachment?

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