

The Pulse of Aging

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What would the pulse of aging look like? I use the term "look like" rather than "feel like" because I look at the pulses as the flow of *qi* through the organ systems rather than as a single or multiple of textures. Naturally I am still "feeling" it but it looks and feels different than trying to determine a quality or texture. The qualities or textures only have meaning within the context of the *qi* flow through the system. When reading the pulses, you are observing the activity of the *qi* and the perfect, normal, balanced pulse feels like a sine wave. Aging is one of the forces on our bodies that can make it harder to maintain this healthy, balanced, coordinated wave.

Before we talk about how aging can affect the pulses, imagine that the sine wave that is the center of the tai chi symbol. The symbol represents the highest balance of polarities; it symbolizes existence. This sine wave is our visual image of the creation of *yin* and *yang*, tranquility and movement, dark and light, movement of each other. When you feel a sine wave, (i.e., the healthy, normal pulse) in your patients, you are feeling a picture of the balance between *yin* and *yang*, organized *qi* flow among the organ systems and their associated body parts, and the dynamics among the elements.

"*Yang* transforms and *yin* conserves. *Yang* and *yin* manifest as movement and rest. *Yang* moves to its utmost then rests. *Yin* rests to its utmost and then moves. Therefore, *yin* rests within *yang*, and *yang* moves within *yin*; the two are inseparably interwoven. It is thus as a single unit that they are with the Tao." (Chu Hsi)

Since pulse diagnosis is the key to determining the causes of symptoms, it makes sense that we can see pulse pictures change as aging proceeds. If there were no problems, no symptoms, then we would feel the normal pulse. If the organ systems are all healthy, all communicating with each other without abnormal differentiations, then we would feel the normal pulse. Naturally, this is not the case by the time patients come to us for help with their health. Their normal pulse has given way to the pulses we feel when we are determining the cause of their symptoms or illness. According to *The Practical of Jin Wei's Pulse Diagnosis*: "It is imperative to know the normal pulse or the pulse seen in the healthy person before the morbid pulses are to be learned because a morbid pulse is in fact the abnormal change of a normal pulse." Therefore, it is important that we know the sine wave, the healthy pulse, in order to determine what imbalances are causing our patients' symptoms.

Our pulses are created from the Heavenly energy that descends and the Earthly energy that ascends and is integrated into what we call man. This is why we can see the very beginning of a person's life in their pulses. It's what I call their *prenatal information*. It is why, in some cases, I ask patients about what was going on when their mother was carrying them. Energetic imbalances may start that early in life. Our neurological patterns are the oldest and the strongest connections in our brain. That is the reason that we can see or feel old emotional stuckness or patterns in the pulses. The neurological connections in the brain are so strong that they can't be denied in the body. Sometimes the beginning

is the cause of current illness or symptomology. The person was "born to worry" or has "a very old history of chronic depression" or other emotional distress. So this person's *qi* began to show the effects of aging when they were very young.

Let's look at kidney *qi* and aging. The right and left proximal pulses are traditionally the measure of the overall level of kidney energy or *qi* (also called *jing*, essence, kidney essence or essential *qi*) in the body. It is basically our constitutional foundation. The decline of kidney *qi* is a natural part of aging and can be felt in the pulses as a small movement that does not move past the kidney positions. This is, in large part, due to the fact that the kidney *qi* has become too weak to fund the other positions.

This lack of kidney exuberance then affects the rest of the body. Since the kidneys rule bones and marrow, it makes sense that the condition of bones and teeth may worsen with age. Hair grays, thins or falls out as kidney *qi* declines. Even problems with hearing and incontinence that may accompany aging are related to the weaker kidney *qi*.

Since the kidneys are the root of the other organs, when the kidney *qi* is too weak to move through to them, you will naturally see decline in function of those other organs. Without the energetic support of the center, the other organ systems will not function properly. For example, let's say that the kidney energy is not properly supporting the spleen. The kidney energy is the first step toward the spleen's sending clear *qi* in vaporized form to the lungs, which then circulate those clear fluids throughout the body. The kidneys determine what is clear and what is turbid, and then pass the clear *qi* on. If they are too weak to do their job, the lungs cannot properly perform in the cycle of organ activities. Further, lung function is not used to its highest potential of allowing one to take a deep breath when the kidneys cannot grasp the *qi*. So there are two examples of how aging of the kidneys and the natural, age-related decline of kidney *qi* can negatively affect other organ systems and the entire body.

This is not to say that we must allow the clock to steal our kidney *qi*. Remember, digestion is how we make our post-Heaven *qi*, the energy that we use to function every day. The state of that production can absolutely be improved, thereby allowing our body to spare kidney *qi*. If we become ill and our body has to use its store of kidney *qi* to help us get well, then our bank of kidney *qi* is reduced. If our digestion is working well and we are making good quality *qi*, then we may not have to steal from the kidney "bank". This is one reason why it is imperative to make certain that our patients' digestion is working well. When your body makes good quality *qi*, you are less likely to be tired, to get sick, to age less than gracefully because you can preserve your essence.

Many patients don't seem to think that their digestion really does anything; they know that they have to eat and drink to live but they don't think about digestion as an energy-producing process. Therefore, talking with them about pre-Heaven and post-Heaven *qi* and how each is engendered is very educational and helpful to them. It puts their health in their hands, with us as a guide and educator. So improve digestion and preserve kidney *qi* to ward off the natural effects of aging. We can't stop the clock but we can minimize the negative effects of time's passing.

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