

TO BI OR NOT TO BI

The musculo-skeletal system is made up of approximately two hundred bones linked together through hundreds of articulating joints and well over two hundred main muscles and associated soft tissues.

This complex system not only enables us to move and contribute to our shape, but also helps us to breathe, digest food and circulate the blood.

The skeletal muscles are made up of overlapping bundles of fibres supplied with blood, lymph (internal cleaning system), and nerves.

Tendons at the end of the muscles attach them to bones. Muscles work in pairs - muscles that bend a joint are called Flexors, while those that straighten a joint are called extensors. Popeye was always showing off his flexors (biceps).

A healthy lifestyle and physical fitness not only makes us feel good but, also helps us to look better by giving us good muscle tone and helps us to control our weight, it will also minimise our risk of disease. No muscle stays completely relaxed and as long as we are conscious, it remains slightly contracted. Remember Popeye's well toned strong flexors after a good healthy portion of spinach?

However, on the downside of striving to look good and feel good there can be the occasional injury:- **SPRAIN** is a tearing of a ligament supporting a joint caused when the joint is forced beyond it's normal range.

OVER-USE - STRAIN, damage will build up gradually over a continued period of time. Symptoms can go unnoticed until it reaches a critical level and there is a sudden onset of pain or muscle spasm - (the straw that broke the camel's back). Chronic inflammation can set in without there being an acute phase.

INFLAMMATION This is the body's natural response to injury and can either be acute or chronic. Local blood vessels dilate and increase blood flow, which causes heat, redness and swelling. Any diagnosis ending with '*it is*' means inflammation. E.g: Tendon*itis* is inflammation of the tendons.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, we use the Term Bi Syndrome (pronounced Bee), to signify syndromes marked by soreness or numbness and heaviness of the muscles, bones and joints with difficulty in bending

and stretching. These symptoms can be made worse with climatic changes and living in very damp places.

A common type of Bi syndrome is called **"Xing Bi"** which is caused by wind, cold and damp invading the body. The symptoms would be wandering soreness of the limbs and joints and difficulty in bending and stretching. This diagnosis would be similar to Rheumatic Arthritis. Treatment by a TCM practitioner would include an appropriate acupuncture prescription, advising a diet of warming foods and to avoid the wind and cold (especially when sweating). **"Zhou Bi"** would give symptoms of fixed soreness or heaviness of joints, heaviness of hands and feet, difficulty in movement or numbness of muscles and swelling of joints. This type is similar to Rheumatoid Arthritis and Bony Arthritis. This can be caused by wind, cold and damp stagnating in the channels, muscles and joints. Apart from acupuncture, you would be advised to avoid cold, uncooked, sweet and fatty foods and to keep away from damp places.

Exercise will help to keep muscles from becoming weak. The key is to find a level that suits you - too much can strain muscles and too little will lead to weakness and stiffness. A range of motion exercises will reduce stiffness and help to keep your joints moving. (A motion exercise for your shoulder would be to rotate your arm in a circular movement). Strengthening exercises will increase muscle strength and endurance exercises will strengthen your heart and give you energy.

Be kind to your body and remember to give yourself time to relax. As well as healthy eating and moderate exercise, choose a relaxation technique that suits you whether it is listening to music, breathing exercises, or laying on the beach. Some people find the art of relaxation quite difficult to do on their own, if this is the case for you, book yourself in for a session of Hypnotherapy, Massage or Reflexology.

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