

## THE BI'S KNEES

I remember when I was about nine or ten years old my mother took me to the doctor because my right leg was twice the size of my left leg, I couldn't walk up and down stairs and I had terrible pain in my knee and lower back. The doctor said I had phlebitis. I was devastated and said that no way would I go back to school with flea bites!

Painful, clicky, popping and stiff knees, do not have to be a sign of old age even though, as we get older, the amount of cartilage in the knees decreases and many ligaments begin to lose some of their elasticity, making them more susceptible to pain and injury. Knee pain is a complaint common among both children and adults.

The knee is the largest joint in the body, containing several muscles that straighten and bend the leg, tendons which attach the muscles to the bones, ligaments which help to control motion by connecting bone to bone and cartilage to help absorb shock during motion.

Knee pain is one of the most common musculo-skeletal complaints seen in an acupuncture clinic and also one of the most effectively treated. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is said that the knees are influenced by the Kidney energy, therefore if the problem has developed over a long period of time and the patient is also experiencing weakness and cold for example, the practitioner will look at the strength of the Kidneys. If it is due to a pathogenic invasion (as described below), it is usually worse on one side, starts suddenly and is affected by the weather.

The Chinese term *Bi syndrome*, (pronounced Bee), is marked by soreness, numbness and heaviness of muscles, bones and joints, with difficulty in bending and stretching, even producing a burning sensation. These symptoms are caused by wind, cold, heat or dampness invading the body and interrupting the flow of Qi (body's energy), and blood:

*Wind bi* is characterised by movement - wandering pain in the joint.

*Painful bi* is caused mainly by cold, local aching and alleviated by warmth and aggravated by cold.

*Fixed bi* is usually caused by damp and is manifested by numbness of the muscles, fixed pain, heaviness and soreness in the joints and would usually occur on cold, rainy and windy days.

*Heat BI* manifests as local redness, swelling, heat and excruciating pain in the joints with limited movement.

Depending on the Traditional Chinese diagnosis, points would be selected specifically to remove these exogenous factors and, according to the diagnosis, other types of treatment would be included, for example; massage, heat, electrodes or cupping.

A ninety eight year old man went to the doctor saying that he could hardly walk because his left knee was so painful. The doctor eyed him up and down and asked, "how old are you?" The old man proudly said " ninety eight years old". The doctor sighed and said, "I'm sorry but, what are you complaining about, you're nearly one hundred years old and you're complaining that you have a sore knee, what do you expect?" The old man replied, "well my other knee is ninety eight years old too and that one doesn't hurt!"

There are some exercises you could do to strengthen the muscles around the knee that help support it, therefore reducing the risk of injury:-

### **Bent-Leg Raises**

1. Sit on a chair and straighten one leg.
2. Hold for one minute.
3. Bend your knee to lower that leg about halfway to the floor (a 45-degree angle).
4. Hold for 30 seconds.
5. Return to starting position and rest for one minute.
6. Repeat.
7. Work up to four repetitions for each leg.

### **Straight-Leg Raises**

1. Sit in a chair with one leg extended, resting your foot on a chair.
2. Lift that foot a few inches while keeping your leg straight.
3. Hold for 10 seconds.
4. Return to resting position for 10 seconds.
5. Repeat.
6. Work up to three minutes of lifting for each leg.