

A Sinking Feeling In Your Stomach

Some emotional crisis happens and you immediately grab your stomach. You exercise all the conscious control you can to say that the incident is inconsequential— but the stomach has a mind of its own.

Something has just happened that is part of a body-mind response. In other words it was not just in your mind... it was in your stomach. If this was just a once in a long while reaction it may not be consequential to your physical makeup, but with this same prolonged reaction to stress or a multitude of stressors, your stomach may actually “prolapse” or fall.

Here are some symptoms to pay attention to. “Do you feel heavy in the lower abdomen generally? Do you get filled up on the first few bites of eating, but still feel hungry? Do you get a lot of gas and bloating—reflecting a generally sluggish digestive system? Are you prone to heartburn or gastric regurgitation. Do you often have to eat something to keep from getting sick? Here’s a big one: Do you have a lot of left side aches or pains; shoulder or scapular tightness, pain in the left hip, aching or numbness in the lower left leg, or pain on the top of the feet, especially on the left?

This could all be the result of a problem that is medically called “Gastroptosis” and while it is documented it is rarely considered or discussed. In fact, in my medical dictionary it has this basic definition: “*gastroptosis n. a condition in which the stomach hangs low in the abdomen and although the diagnosis was once used to explain various abdominal complaints, it is now considered that the stomach may assume various anatomical positions without causing any symptoms.*”

I can’t agree. Basically, I find that by reversing the condition many chronic complaints are completely ameliorated. In Japan, where I lived for a number of years, mention of the possibility that *Ikasui* or stomach prolapse, may be a problem, the concerned reaction in its relationship to long term problems became a major factor. Women start reaching for their chins and breasts for it is well known that prolapsed stomach is a prelude to major sagging features.

Here’s what can happen when the stomach sinks so low: It pulls on the diaphragm compromising effective respiration, stretches the esophagus making it hard to swallow and lowers the hiatal sphincter making one more prone to heartburn or gastric upset.

It crowds the lower abdomen enough to cause distress on the large intestine, especially in the Sigmoid Colon and the Descending Colon. This is often a factor to chronic constipation or in cases of high stress, IBD. It is almost always a factor in the treatment of all bowel diseases, including Crohn’s Disease and Colitis.

It causes crowding in the uterus, restricting proper blood flow there and allowing for abnormal growth factors. All this can eventually cause further prolapse of the bladder and put stress and crowding on the prostate gland as well. This can lead to a whole host of fibroid tumors and endometrial growths in the female reproductive area.

The body’s physique can begin to change over time from constant pulling on the esophagus, causing the neck and shoulders to pull gravitationally forward and down putting special stress on the base of the neck at C-6 and C-7. I also see a strong association between this cause and complaints of Dowager’s hump and kyphosis of the thoracic spine. Spasms and enlargement of the muscles on the left side of the back are also quite common, as well as a pronicity to have left side sciatic and hip problems. Because it compromises the efficiency of the digestion, making it less efficient and more sluggish, it can be a major factor in weight gain or its opposite a total lack of appetite. Often people who eat very little find that they can’t begin to lose weight at all.

It can also cause constriction on the circulation through the groin area, leading to cold legs and freezing feet. Neuropathies of the lower legs or feet are most often the result of the prolapsed stomach cutting off circulation at the groin.

I believe it is one of the leading causes behind fibromyalgia, Lupus, Crohn’s disease, Colitis. I also find it very consistent in pregnancy cases where miscarriages are common and morning sickness is extensive. Because of the way it crowds the uterus, it can be the underlying problem in a host of fibroid tumors, endometriosis and profuse uterine bleeding.

Actually, the ramifications extend ever further. In Chinese medicine, where we are always looking to balance the body, we can see this as causing the body to literally spin out of control. The stomach counterweights and controls the aggressions of the Liver, but when it is compromised, it absolutely allows the Liver/Gallbladder complex to run roughshod over the rest of the body. Further, when the dietary system is insufficient, food processing and absorption decrease, which may eventually limit nutritional supplementation of the body, affecting the base support systems of the Spleen, Kidneys and Lungs.

Causes

While I am sticking my neck out in presentation of this little understood phenomenon, I might as well talk about the emotional side of this disorder and say that its main cause is worry and over thinking.

Yes, this includes the type A personality so rewarded in today's society. In Chinese medicine, we have always known that over concern is the emotional realm of the earth element and that to its extreme it disrupts the Qi (pronounced chi and meaning vital energy) of the stomach element. Unfortunately, this is not a one-way street, but means that we are caught in a cycle of mind and body, which largely in Chinese medicine we see as one. In other words, when our proclivity to worry, over think, obsess etc., is locked into this physical disposition, we are increasingly prone to the very behaviors and emotions that may have been the incipient cause of this problem in the first place. One of the hallmarks of someone with a prolapsed stomach is a particular type of insomnia where we are not able to shut off concern and fall asleep without a fair amount of diversion from our mind-active, over-emotional selves with the stomach churning over something we are worrying about.

Though they have not necessarily reached the same conclusions, western medical research is closing in on some of the same ideas. For the last 30 years or so, a new research field has opened up called neurogastroenterology. This came along with the realization the digestive system has a completely separate nervous system from the central nervous system that dominates the rest of the body. This is called the enteric plexus. Moreover, this second and parallel system was found to have as its primary neurotransmitter, serotonin, the same as in the brain and the central nervous system and not other neurohormones of the vagal nerve connection that it was always thought to have.

The ramifications of this are ever expanding. Lots of doctors and gastroenterologists have had to deal with idiopathic (cause unknown or unaccounted for) *gut reactions*. Increasingly, we are looking for answers from the fairly new field of body-mind medicine and have started to accept that our sensorial and emotional selves aren't restricted to input recognitions from the brain and central nervous system. The point is that in the west we are starting to realize that the body mind complex that Chinese medicine has always mapped out as one system, is not too hard to accept.

Conclusions

I have been reticent over the years to expose this unknown quantity in chronic medical care because it is relatively unknown. However, I regard it as the crossroads of most other major health problems of this modern age. It has become increasingly common because of the high stress and worry we all live with, and has been a main concern in over half of the chronic patients I treat. I believe it is the leading cause behind fibromyalgia, Lupus, Crohn's disease, Colitis, spontaneous abortions and morning sickness, a host of fibroid tumors and endometriosis and migraines. The important thing is that it can be treated and all these symptoms reversed using our exclusive Nesshi therapy which I brought from Japan.