

Western Vs. Chinese Medicine: Which is Better? – by Lee Holden



Western and Chinese medicine are both intended to improve patients' health, yet they have vastly different approaches. If you walk into a TCM doctor's office with a non-acute ailment, they might prescribe herbs, an acupuncture "massage," or Qi Gong exercises to do at home. On the other hand, if you visit a western medical hospital with the same condition, you'll likely encounter high-tech machines and prescription pills.

How can two approaches to healthcare be so different? Which one is better? To answer these questions, you must first understand how they each view the human body. In this blog post, we explore the similarities, differences, and comparative strengths of Western and Chinese medicine.

How Western And Chinese Medicine Approach The Human Body

Western and Chinese medicine each view the human body in fundamentally different ways. The comparison between a gardener and a mechanic aptly shows the key differences.

Chinese medicine practitioners work with the human body much like a gardener tends to their garden. To grow healthy plants, a gardener focuses on planting

seeds, providing the right nourishment for the soil, and removing weeds. The gardener views the garden as alive and organic. All parts connect to one another. Similarly, in Chinese medicine, practitioners focus on proactively cultivating health and vitality by working skillfully with the body's natural energy. Just as a gardener waters the seeds and pulls weeds every day, a Chinese medicine practitioner spends time each morning cultivating nourishing energy (Qi) within the body and purging noxious energy. By taking a proactive approach, Chinese medicine can address many ailments before they even arise.

Prevention Vs. Treatment

The 'preventative' nature of Chinese medicine leads many to view it as an "inside out" approach. In other words, Chinese medicine practitioners emphasize the importance of working *within* the body to address health issues, rather than focusing on *external* treatments. This is where Traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine differ.

In Western medicine, Doctors view the human body similar to how a mechanic views an engine.

If the radiator in your car isn't working properly, a mechanic will focus on fixing the radiator. They won't necessarily pay close attention to the gas tank, tires, or other parts of the vehicle. Among mechanics, it's understood that each part of a car is relatively separate from the other parts.

Similarly, if you go to a Western medical doctor with a sore throat, they'll likely focus *only* on your throat, without paying close attention to the rest of your body. In fact, if your symptoms are severe enough, your doctor will send you to a throat specialist. Of course, throat specialists focus on throat issues and nothing else. Additionally, when you go to a Western medical doctor, the treatment happens *to* you. For example, the doctor may perform a procedure or prescribe medication, but there's not much for *you* to actually do besides take pills. For this reason, Western medicine is an "outside-in" approach, since it focuses primarily on external interventions rather than internal practices.

The Strengths Of Chinese Medicine

The distinctions between Western and Chinese medicine leads both to have unique strengths that the other can't offer.

When it comes to preventing disease and illness, Chinese medicine provides great wisdom and insight. Instead of focusing mostly on *treatment*, Chinese medicine emphasizes *prevention*. After all, most people would prefer to stay healthy in the first place.

Chinese medicine is amazing at activating your body's innate healing potential. Practices such as Qi Gong, breathing exercises, and acupuncture are easy to do at

home and can go a long way in helping you stay healthy and well. In general, the Western medical system neglects the importance of prevention, which leads to excessive hospital visits and healthcare costs.

Another great benefit of Chinese medicine is that most treatments have minimal side effects, if any. This means that individuals can enjoy the health benefits of practices such as Qi Gong and acupuncture offers without worrying about negative repercussions. Compare this to the assurances that many prescription pills offer. If you've ever seen a commercial for a new prescription drug, you know that the possible side effects of many pills always seem far worse than the problems they're intended to solve.

For issues such as joint or back pain, practices such as Qi Gong can often lead to significant pain relief without the risk of further injury. By contrast, surgeries can *sometimes* help, but they can also lead to further pain and discomfort.

The Strengths Of Western Medicine

While Western medicine shouldn't be overly relied upon, it certainly has its place.

Western medicine has wonderful benefits that are invaluable in many situations, especially when acute conditions are present. If a person is facing an immediately life-threatening situation, it isn't the time for preventative medicine or self-healing practices.

When someone is seriously injured, blood transfusions and emergency surgeries can be life-saving. Similarly, if you get a severe bacterial infection, antibiotics can quickly combat their rapid spread. There are numerous other situations in which Western medicine can provide invaluable treatments that help people survive in challenging circumstances.

Additionally, there are many cases in which medication can be extremely helpful for individuals. As mentioned, it's important to tread with caution and not *overprescribe*, but medication drugs can be a powerful tool when used with care.

The Importance Of Western And Eastern Approaches

Fortunately, the decision to use Western or Chinese medicine doesn't need to be an "either/or" decision. In fact, the best approach to healthcare is to be open to *both*, based on your own personal needs.

When you combine Western and Chinese medicine, you're able to enjoy the benefits of each. Instead of waiting until you're sick to address your health, you can use Chinese medicine to cultivate vitality while you're still strong. If something happens that requires a Western medical treatment, you can appreciate all of the powerful technology and resources Western medicine offers.

Additionally, combining Western medical technology with Chinese medicine practices is a great way to enhance preventative medicine. In the twenty-first century, there are numerous medical tests that can detect various conditions in the body. By using Western technology to help diagnose health conditions and integrating Chinese medicine to establish long-term treatment plans, you're able to leverage the best of both worlds.