

THE LARGE INTESTINE

(Collated by Michelle Wilkinson www.movingnaturally.co.uk)

The large intestine lies in the lower abdominal cavity starting at the ileocecal valve or sphincter at the end of the ileum section of the small intestine in the bottom right-hand side.

The ileocecal valve or sphincter is a muscular ring which controls the flow of digested waste into the large intestine sometimes referred to as the colon.

The pocket shaped cecum is the first section of the large intestine.

Joined to the cecum is the appendix, a blind-ended tube which in the early stages of human evolution played a part in the digestion of plant food. It is known to be formed of lymphoid tissue which contains white blood cells part of the immune system.

The large intestine is 1.5m (5ft) in length and 6.5 cm (2.5 in) in diameter.

It follows the shape of a shield travelling up the right-hand side of the lower abdomen as the ascending colon, passing under the lower ribcage below the liver and spleen as the transverse colon and finally travelling down the left-hand side of the lower abdomen as the descending colon until passes to the midline to become the rectum leading into the anus.

There are two main functions of the large intestine. One is to absorb water aiding the body's fluid balance and the other is to make the digested waste easier to expel in the form of stools.

Water-absorbing cells are spread throughout the smooth lining of the colon as well as attaching to the sides of the lining's small mucus secreting glands.

The colon has more bacteria than the rest of the body put together creating a layer within the colon 2cm (0.8in) thick.

This huge number of microbes thrive in the warmth and moisture of the interior colon. They can breakdown substances which have avoided digestion before they themselves are expelled.

Bacteria makes a range of useful chemicals such as vitamin K which the large intestine absorbs into the body.

By the time the waste is expelled bacteria forms 50%. It has taken 5-10 hours in the large intestine for the waste to be compacted ready for elimination as faeces or stools.

The large intestine has muscular bands called taeniae which gather it up into a series of pockets called haustra which help to compact the waste prior to moving it on.

Faeces contain a variable amount of water, undigested fibre, dead gut cells, living and dead bacteria. It also has digested bile pigments which give stools their colour.

Faeces are pushed into the rectum by peristalsis. The rectum is 20cm (8in) long and holds the stools until they are expelled (defecation) via the anus.

Preparation for defecation is made by automatic reflexes but begins when the outer sphincter of the anus relaxes a movement initiated through voluntary control.

In traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) the large intestine is regarded as one of the 'pushing organs' of the lower burner. There is a downward push with release like that found in the bladder, rectum and womb.

The lower burner and its contents could be viewed as the embodiment of the Primal Self.

Excretion is the first act of pushing babies perform and it underlies the push developmental pattern within the skeletal muscles, especially the legs.

The act of pushing especially pushing away helps to provide healthy boundaries by rejecting what does not feel right.

The lungs, skin and large intestine are a direct boundary between a human and their environment.

TCM offers an important relationship between the lungs and the large intestine. The descending Lung Qi supports the large intestine's downward movement while the Large Intestine Qi supports the Lung Qi to descend. People with deficient Lung Qi often have constipation difficulties.

In TCM the large intestine is connected to a person's ability to let go; not to dwell on the past by hanging onto things which no longer serve them. This could be beliefs, possessions, relationships or thoughts. By cutting through ego and delusion it is possible for a person to find what is truly of value and worth, their inner treasure.

The pathway of the large intestine meridian runs from the tip of each index finger up the lateral aspect of the arm until it reaches the top of the shoulder. From here it travels diagonally over the front of the neck and jaw to cross under the nose and finish at the side of the opposite nostril. In the back of the legs, it travels down the lateral edges until it meets the feet. Here it run horizontally along each sole pad near the toes.

Joining Valley or its ancient name the Great Eliminator is a large intestine acupressure point (LI4) which lies at the back of the hand in the webbing between the thumb and the index finger (more towards the index finger). Because of its powerful dispersal of Qi, it should not be used in pregnancy. It can be used for painful conditions such as headaches and toothache. It calms the mind and strengthens the defensive Qi of the body.

Welcome Fragrance is a large intestine acupressure point (LI20) which can be found in the midpoint of the groove at either side of the bulb of the nose. Press towards the side of the nose and then stretch away. It supports all nasal conditions including colds, hay fever, nosebleeds and sinusitis. It exerts an influence throughout the face treating conditions such as red eyes and facial paralysis.

The sense of smell taps into a person's instinctual animal nature.