

THE STOMACH

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

The stomach is a J-shaped muscular bag that is suspended from the liver and diaphragm by elastic omentum in the upper left quadrant of the abdomen.

This organ comfortably holds 1 litre of food. However, it can expand as much as 3 litres causing it to rest on the bladder or womb.

The stomach starts at the end of the oesophagus at the oesophageal sphincter.

It ends by emptying its contents of chyme into the duodenum section of the small intestine via the pyloric sphincter.

The role of the stomach within digestion is two-fold. It secretes gastric juice composed of hydrochloric acid and enzymes which breakdown the food contents. Additionally, the peristaltic movements of the stomach's smooth muscles, operating in a similar way to a washing machine, mix the food and secreted enzymes into a liquid named chyme.

According to the amount of food consumed this breakdown and mixing process can take between 40 minutes to several hours.

Emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety may slow down stomach digestion because they stimulate the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) which inhibits gastric activity because it is preparing the body for action.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) the stomach is regarded as the most important yang organ and called the 'Great Granary'. It is responsible for the nourishment of all the other organs. It also controls a person's ability to receive, appetite for food and is the holding ground for ingested food.

Strong stomach ki or qi (energy) is synonymous with robust health, while weak stomach produces fatigue and ill-health.

The stomach and its meridian control the descent of food ki or qi down the body. They also provide the appropriate amount of ki or qi in the Three Burners of the torso.

In the Zen Shiatsu Theory, the stomach is important for human acceptance. This can be seen in a range of circumstances from the capacity of a woman

to accept a male seed and develop an embryo to the ability to accept nourishment on all levels. An inability to receive may be hidden behind overly giving to others.

On the psychological level the stomach represents our hungers and our needs and the ways a person can fulfil them whether this concerns knowledge, love or security. Compensatory eating can be viewed as the effect of frustration from a person not having had their needs met.

For people with a mental and physical energetic imbalance related to the stomach ki or qi, the mind is often given greater priority while less attention is paid to the body and its need for physical activity.

The stomach meridian starts directly below the eyes on each side, runs down right and left cheek to the corners of the mouth. It continues down to the jawline, then either side of the oesophagus until it reaches the collarbone (clavicle) on the right and left. Here it runs horizontally along the superior edge of the collarbone until it reaches the midpoint. Then it further descends straight down through each nipple line and the right and left side of the ribcage until it narrows to three fingers' width away from the midline on either side. It continues straight down the abdomen until it reaches the pubic bone. Here it moves diagonally on each side across the groin to the outer edges of the thigh. It now descends each leg through the lateral border of rectus femoris, lateral to the kneecap (patella), down the tibialis anterior and coming just lateral to the dorsum of each foot between the second and third metatarsals. Finally, it ends on the nails of the second toes.

ST25 acupressure point is three fingers' width lateral to each side of the navel. It is called 'Heavenly Axis' and is important in the regulation and functioning of the intestines.

ST36 acupressure point is four fingers' width below the lateral border of each kneecap and one finger's width lateral to the crest of each tibia in the lower legs. It is namely 'Leg Three Miles' and supports aching muscles and joints. It can activate appetite and vitality whilst aiding digestion.