Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) views sexual energy as the primary force of life (Jing essence). In this article, the author presents a brief overview of the TCM perspective on sexual dysfunction and its herbal treatment.

According to TCM, the sexual essence or Jing essence is stored in the kidneys. The kidneys, together with the adrenal glands, testicles, and ovaries, are viewed as an organ system. In western medicine, the kidneys regulate the fluid and acid-base balance of the body. The adrenal glands secrete hormones that influence metabolism, sexual characteristics, blood pressure, sodium balance, and the body’s physical and emotional response to stress. The testes and ovaries produce hormones responsible for reproduction and sexual characteristics. TCM regards the kidney system as the "root of life." Kidney energy contributes to the "balance of sexual hormones, body fluids, endocrine, immunity and metabolism." Healthy kidney energy also guards against physical and emotional stress.

Loss of sexual vitality may be due to fatigue, poor health, medications, depression, anxiety, grief, stress, conflict, or traumatic sexual experiences such as rape. Sexual dysfunction due to a psychological problem may be helped by herbs that "calm the mind and promote balanced energy.” Eleuthero (Eleutherococcus senticosus) is an herb commonly recommended for women to calm the mind and promote sexual vitality.

Most TCM sexual herbal tonics are combinations of herbs that nourish the kidneys. Horny goat weed (Epimedium sagittatum) is an example of an herb that “warms the kidneys,” raising sexual energy for both women and men. (In TCM the kidneys are considered susceptible to "cold." Herbs that nurture the kidneys promote "warmth" of the kidneys.) According to the author, recent studies have shown that epimedium improves immunity. Schisandra (Schisandra chinensis), another herb used in TCM to heal sexually transmitted disease, has shown anti-viral activity specific to HIV.
Sexual impotence is treated in TCM with different combinations of herbs. Impotence may be caused by excessive sexual activity, "over-exertion of the brain," emotional distress, or pathological conditions. Herbal tonics used to treat impotence will vary according to the source of the problem. The author warns against the use of a single herb to solve complicated problems such as impotence. Yohimbe (*Pausynystalia yohimbe*), an African herb with a reputation as a sexual stimulant, constricts blood vessels, increases the heart rate and blood pressure, and may increase penile circulation. Unless it is combined with other herbs to balance its effects, yohimbe can cause hypertension and severe headaches. Other herbs reputed to help impotence (such as ephedra [*Ephedra sinica*], ginseng [*Panax ginseng*], and bitter orange [*Citrus aurantium*]) contain properties helpful to the condition, but may have little effect if used singularly.

The author supplies a table of herbs useful for improving sexual vitality according to TCM. Properties associated with herbs that cultivate sexual vitality include: "warm, qi-generating, nurturing and generating kidney energies, nurturing blood and body fluid essence, blood thinners, and vessel dilators and constrictors that improve blood circulation." —*Leela Devi, MSN, RN*