

## Treating the whole person

Orthodox medicine identifies an invader (bacteria, a virus or a parasite) or a disorder within the body (such as cancer or hardened arteries) and attacks this 'enemy' with powerful weapons. It deals with individual portions of the body in isolation. Although doctors now recognize some exacerbating factors such as smoking or a high-fat diet, they normally view diseases as events that occur through chance infection - and their offensive tactics often defeat the invader very successfully. Orthodox medicine is based on an in-depth knowledge of physical anatomy and physiology, and on observations of the effects that drugs and surgery have on ailments.

Eastern therapeutic practices - and reflexology, which comes from the same tradition - take what seems to be a less aggressive approach. They believe that an illness is caused by a number of factors, including an inner problem that has weakened the body's natural defences. They seek to heal this by strengthening the body, removing any obstacles to well-being and improving the energy flow.

That is not to say that Eastern therapeutic practices are necessarily gentle. Acupuncture can be as invasive as minor surgery; the herbal mixtures used in Chinese herbal medicine can taste foul; some forms of oriental massage make you feel as if holes are being drilled in your bones. However, everything is aimed at strengthening and healing the whole self (often including non-physical levels such as the spiritual and emotional) rather than simply identifying and attacking certain unwanted symptoms.

Reflexologists and Chinese medical practitioners will work on the symptoms as well, to make the patient more comfortable while dealing with the deeper problem. What they don't do is work on the symptoms alone,



ABOVE **The Eastern theory of meridian lines that transfer chi around the body is the foundation of acupressure. Here we see the acupoints of the kidney meridian.**

since suppressing the symptoms will simply force the problem to express itself in some other way. If you continually suppress the symptoms without tackling the root problem, the ailment will go on getting worse, causing ever more serious effects and finally damaging the entire system. In the same way, no GP would treat the outward symptoms of a serious infection without prescribing drugs to clear the infection itself. However, until very recently, orthodox medicine has not recognized that diseases can stem from more subtle agents than bacteria, viruses and parasites.