## Depression, Sadness and Lack of Interest in Life

Symptoms like depression, sadness, and lack of interest in life are seen as signs of Shén (神) disturbance — a disruption in the harmony of the spirit, emotions, and organ systems. These symptoms reflect a loss of internal connection, vitality, and emotional flow, and can arise from various Zang-Fu imbalances, especially involving the Heart, Liver, Lung, Spleen, and Kidney. TCM does not classify depression as a single disease entity but views it as a collection of patterns involving emotional stagnation (Qi, Blood, or Shen blocked), deficiency (Qi, Blood, Yin, or Yang failing to nourish mind and body), Phlegm or Damp obstruction and loss of harmony between Zang organs, especially Heart, Liver, and Spleen. In TCM, depression is often referred to as Yu Zheng (郁证) — “constraint disorder” — where Qi, emotions, and spirit become stuck or depleted. What You Might See:

* Persistent low mood
* Sadness, often with crying or emotional heaviness
* Apathy, loss of motivation or joy
* Fatigue, mental and physical
* Withdrawal from others, loss of desire to engage in life.
* Poor concentration, forgetfulness
* Insomnia or excessive sleeping
* Digestive issues, appetite loss, body aches, or heaviness

These are manifestations of Shen disharmony, with various Zang-Fu patterns at the root.

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| Pattern | Description | Symptoms | Tongue | Pulse | Causes | Treatment Principle | Formulas |
| Liver Qi Stagnation | This is one of the most common causes of mild to moderate depression, especially when linked to emotional repression or frustration. | Low mood, sighing, chest tightness, irritability, PMS, mood swings | Normal or slightly red edges | Wiry | Emotional suppression, stress, frustration, lack of expression | Soothe Liver, move Qi, regulate emotions | *Xiao Yao San*, *Chai Hu Shu Gan San* |
| Heart Blood or Heart Qi Deficiency | The Shen is not nourished → emotional emptiness, sadness, withdrawal | Sadness, palpitations, fatigue, poor memory, insomnia, pale complexion | Pale, thin | Weak, thin | Chronic illness, worry, haemorrhage, Spleen deficiency | Tonify Heart Qi or Blood, calm Shen | *Gui Pi Tang*, *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang* |
| Spleen Qi Deficiency (sometimes with Damp) | When Spleen fails to transform and transport, Dampness and heaviness accumulate, leading to emotional and physical sluggishness. | Apathy, heaviness, fatigue, poor appetite, loose stools, brain fog | Pale, swollen, white coat | Weak or soggy | Poor diet, overthinking, overwork, sedentary lifestyle | Tonify Spleen Qi, resolve Damp, lift mood | *Liu Jun Zi Tang*, *Shen Ling Bai Zhu San* |
| Phlegm Obstructing the Heart / Orifices | Phlegm mists the Heart → confusion, emotional dullness, despair | Depression with mental fog, lack of clarity, emotional flatness, chest oppression | Swollen, greasy coat | Slippery or wiry | Chronic Damp accumulation, Spleen weakness, emotional repression | Transform Phlegm, open orifices, move Qi | *Wen Dan Tang*, *Ban Xia Hou Po Tang* |
| Heart and Kidney Disharmony | When Heart Fire and Kidney Yin are not in harmony, the Shen becomes disturbed and disconnected from the root. | Depression with anxiety, fear, insomnia, night sweats, tinnitus, back pain | Red, peeled | Thin, rapid | Emotional trauma, aging, sexual overexertion, chronic stress | Harmonize Heart and Kidney, anchor the Shen | *Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan*, *Jiao Tai Wan* |
| Lung Qi or Lung Yin Deficiency (grief-related) | The Lungs are associated with grief and letting go. When weakened, sadness and emotional constriction occur. | Persistent sadness, sighing, fatigue, weak voice, spontaneous sweating, or dry cough | Pale or dry | Weak or thin | Unresolved grief or chronic sadness, Lung weakness | Tonify Lung Qi/Yin, regulate emotions | *Sheng Mai San*, *Mai Men Dong Tang* |

In TCM, depression, sadness, and lack of interest are seen as manifestations of Shen disturbance, rooted in dysfunction of one or more Zang-Fu systems — most often the Liver, Heart, Spleen, Lung, and Kidney. The cause may be stagnation, deficiency, Phlegm, or trauma, and effective treatment requires identifying the pattern and restoring harmony at the physical and emotional level.