

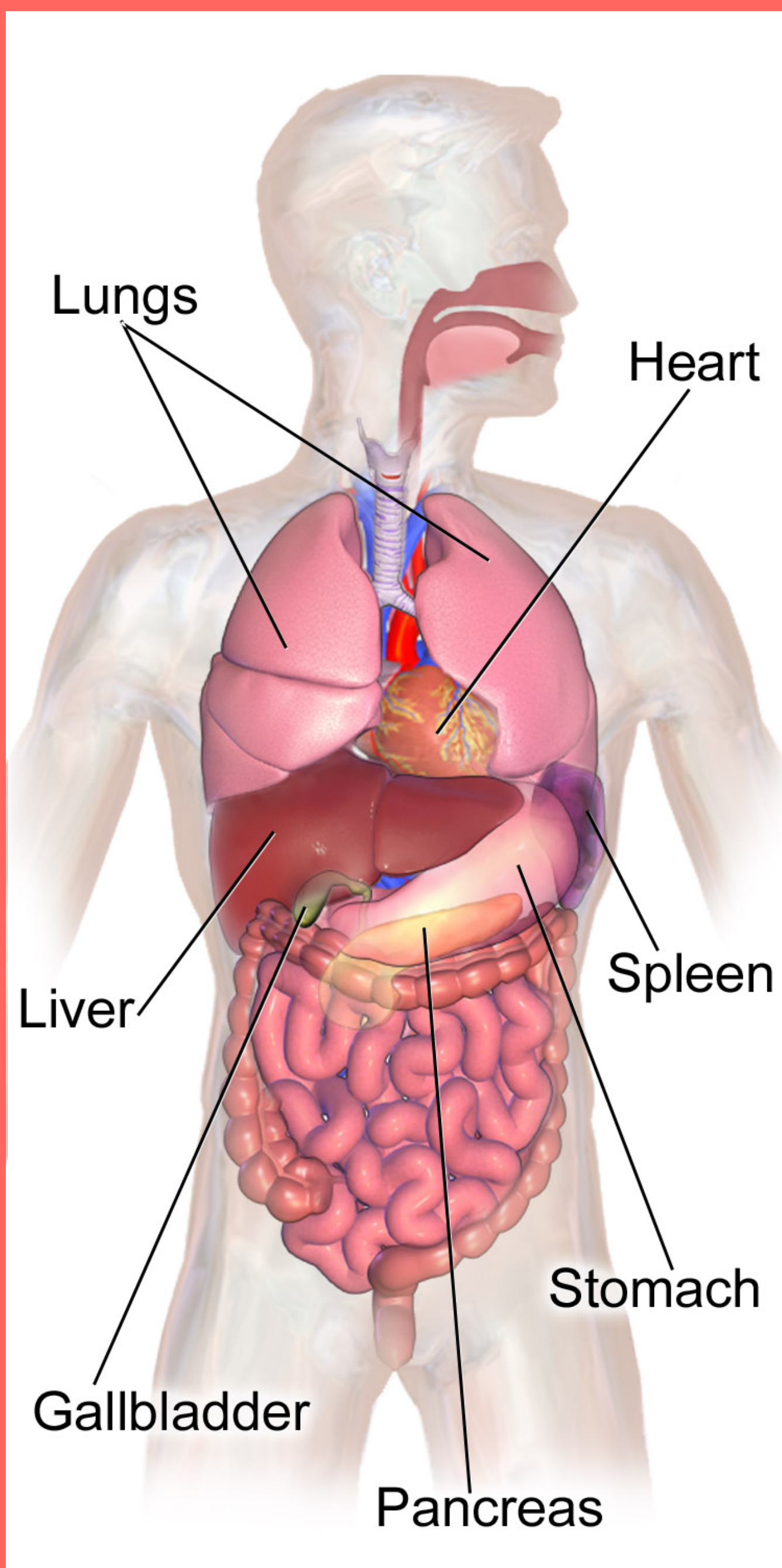
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IS ANEMIA THE SAME AS BLOOD DEFICIENCY?

A patient comes to a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) or acupuncture clinic and reports strong feelings of fatigue. The patient looks pale and is in a weakened state. A diagnosis of anemia in Western medicine and a syndrome of blood deficiency in Chinese medicine may be given. But is anemia the same as blood deficiency?

Let's first look at the definition of anemia: a clinical manifestation in which the number of red blood cells or the amount of hemoglobin is low, so the blood's oxygen-carrying capacity is insufficient. An inadequate supply of oxygen in the body produces the symptoms and signs of anemia, such as fatigue, pallor, weakness, etc. Anemia may be caused by numerous medical conditions, including bleeding, nutritional deficiencies, hemolysis (rupturing of blood cells), genetic defects, bone marrow failure, etc. A complete blood workup and other procedures are usually required to confirm the diagnosis. Treatment is focused on the underlying causes revealed by the diagnosis.





In TCM, blood is a vital nutritive substance in the body. When the middle jiao, or the region of the body containing the spleen and stomach receives nourishment, the spleen and stomach transform it into blood. Ying (nutrient) Qi flows into the vessels to be transformed into blood. If blood does not go into circulation, it turns into essence (substance vital to life) in the kidney; if essence does not leak out, it is transformed into blood in the liver.

After being formed, blood normally circulates in the blood vessels throughout the body via the heart. The heart dominates the blood and vessels, and heart Qi is the driving force for blood circulation. Spleen Qi controls blood flow and prevents extravasation (blood seeping out of tissue) in addition to blood formation. The liver promotes the smooth flow of Qi, stores blood, and regulates the blood volume. Blood nourishes and moistens various tissues and organs of the body.

Blood deficiency is mainly related to the liver, kidney, heart, and spleen according to their functions. Blood deficiency in a patient may be clinically manifested by symptoms and signs due to lack of nourishment and hydration, such as tiredness, paleness, dryness, dizziness, weakness, numbness, etc. Together with a pulse and tongue diagnosis, a specific TCM syndrome can be identified. In summary, an anemic patient must have blood deficiency, while a patient with blood deficiency may not have anemia as evidenced by the blood workup results.

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