

Differentiation of spleen disease syndromes

A TCM Quarterly Announcement

September 2, 2020

The pathogenesis of spleen disease can be summarized according to the five functions of the spleen: transformation of food into nutrition for the blood and Qi (脾主运化), influence on circulation (脾统血), aversion of dampness (脾恶湿), cooperation with the stomach (脾合胃), and control of extremities' musculature (脾主四肢肌肉). The fundamental pathogenic factor of disease of the spleen is dampness, which can be separated into external and internal dampness. External dampness arises when a person resides in a humid climate that may also be exacerbated by frequent rains, especially in the Late Summer. Internal dampness occurs due to alcohol abuse or an unbalanced diet, such as excessive consumption of cold fruit, which can inhibit the spleen's ability to transform food into nutrition. The pathogenesis can also be understood by the relationship between excess and deficiency. Deficiency is characterized by the spleen's inability to transform dampness, leading to an abundance of damp pathogens (excess).

According to the theory of syndrome differentiation, they can be separated according to Qi, blood, deficiency, excess, coldness, and heat.

Treatment of spleen diseases are centered around this concept: strengthen the spleen when it is not transporting and use diuretics on the stomach to descend food when food won't pass through the gastronomic tract. According to the *Miracle Pivot of The Yellow Emperor's Classic on Internal Medicine*, it questions, "Cold food is suitable for heat in the stomach, and hot food is suitable for coldness in the intestines. The nature of coldness and heat are opposite. So, how should it be treated?" This question points toward the use of both tonification and use of diuretics in treating spleen diseases.

Now, to look at specific ailments of the spleen:

Stomachache or abdominal pain can be separated into fullness with or without pain. Fullness (distension) with pain is more serious, and stagnation of gastric Qi causes it. Also, the distension may cause tightness in the chest. When accompanied with prickling pain, there may be blood stasis. Cold pathogens are indicated by pain, vomiting, and clear salivation while hot pathogens include halitosis and cold aversion.

Vomiting can be separated into insufficiency and excess syndromes. Excess syndrome is short-term with profuse vomiting. The vomit is often putrid and sour. The patient has a strong pulse followed by chills or sweating. Deficiency syndrome is a long-term bout of smaller amounts of vomiting, possibly described as "not being able to keep food down." The patient may have a weak pulse.

The characteristics of hiccups on which to focus include the frequency and sound. They can be separated into cold, hot, excess, and deficiency. The cold are warm; the hot are clear.

Nausea and "choking" (噎膈) are feelings that arise when food is difficult to keep down. Choking, or "噎," refers to when food won't go down the esophagus. That is combined with the

character “隔,” which refers to the diaphragm. Together, they can be referred to as “choking.” When a patient feels this, the disease is in the esophagus. Nausea, however, the disease is below the navel. Typically, the beginning stages of the ailment belong to excess syndrome, and the latter stages belong to deficiency syndrome. It can be caused by phlegm obstructing Qi or Yin causing a Qi deficiency.

Diarrhea is a common digestive disorder involving loose or watery stools. Because of external pathogenesis, food, feelings, or deficiency, an obstruction of the digestive function of the spleen and stomach can arise. The main type of pathogen here is dampness. For acute diarrhea, often dampness damages the spleen, leading to an obstruction in the middle-burner; the intestines and stomach can't cooperate; thus, the clear and turbid (good and bad) of food can't be separated. In chronic diarrhea, deficiency of the spleen increases the amount of dampness. The liver has begun to assist or almost replace the spleen in transforming food. Meaning that because of the failures of the spleen, the liver has to work extra hard. For severe diarrhea, an abundance of dampness is the main cause, especially when accompanied by long-term spleen deficiency.

Constipation refers to the inability to defecate, often due to dryness of the stool. The main characteristic of this is failure of the spleen and stomach, leading to failure in the large intestines. Heat in the stools refers to excess syndrome, and coldness in the stools refers to deficiency syndrome. The main treatment is diuretic, but long-term use of rhubarb should be avoided.

Blood in the stool or vomit belongs to blood disorders. It is often related to the spleen's influence over circulation. When that is combined with dysfunction of the liver, hemorrhage (bleeding) causes damage to Yin, and removal of Qi leads to the death of Yang. After internal hemorrhage, the blood remains inside. Accumulation causes blood stasis, which leads to the onset of blood in the stool or vomit.

Phlegm retention refers to the failure of the body to disperse phlegm. The two aspects that separate its types include the Triple-Burner and the Lung-Spleen-Kidney's functions related to water metabolism. As the Triple-Burner is the pathway of all of the body's fluids, when its Qi and meridians are obstructed, water begins to accumulate. In the ancient TCM theory, there are four types of fluid (四饮): Phlegm retention (痰饮) refers to water residing within the intestines. It may be accompanied with borborygmy (rumbling sound in the intestines) and the throat. This often occurs due to a failure of Yang to “boil” or “steam” the water upwards. Lateral thoracic fluid retention (悬饮) refers to water retention in the thoracic cavity. It could be related to conventional medicine's pleural effusion, but TCM theory lacks adequate anatomical knowledge, and it is mainly referred to as phlegm in the “flank” of the thoracic cavity. Excessive fluid retention (溢饮) may refer to conventional medicine's “anasarca.” It is defined as general swelling in the extremities. Clinically, it is seen affecting the (conventional medicine) endocrine system. Thoracic phlegm retention (支饮) refers specifically to the fluid retention within the thoracic (chest) cavity. In this situation, the damp pathogens can easily invade the pericardium, causing chest pain as well as interfering with the lung's functions.

Another type of spleen disease can be referred to as “spleen fever” (脾瘵). This refers to when pathogens interfere with the stomach and spleen's cooperation in digestion, leading to

one of the three heats (三热) : damp-heat (湿热) , dry-heat (干热), and stagnant-heat (瘀热).

Treatments:

Warming to eliminate dampness (温中燥湿法): this method is used for when cold-dampness encumbers the spleen.

- Symptoms: chest distension, vomiting, nausea, dizziness, loose stools, diarrhea, edema in extremities; thick, mossy tongue and a floating pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Stomach poria decoction (胃苓汤) and Lǐ zhōng decoction (理中汤).
- Common herbs: atractylodes, magnolias, citrus peels, nutmeg, poria cocos, and alisma orientalis. For Yang deficiency: add epiphyllum, cinnamon, and Sichuan peppers.

Alleviating heat and transforming dampness (清热化湿法): is used for when damp-hot pathogens accumulate in the spleen.

- Symptoms: yellowness in the face, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth, constipation, fever, rapid pulse, and a greasy, yellow tongue-coating.
- Common prescriptions: Artemisia capillaris decoction (茵陈蒿汤) Wáng shì lián pǔ drink (王氏连朴饮)、Ganlu detoxifying cinnabar (甘露消毒丹)、and Middle-clearing decoction (清中汤).
- Common herbs: artemisia capillaris, gardenia jasminoides, rhubarb, phellodendron, polyporus umbellata, poria cocos, alisma orientalis, oxalis, and lysimachia christinae.

Expelling dampness method (攻逐水湿法): is used for when dampness stops moving inside the body.

- Symptoms: abdominal distension, constipation, thickness in the middle of the tongue, and a sunken, slippery pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Dà chéng qì decoction (大承气汤), Shí zǎo decoction (十枣汤)、and Zhōuchē pills (舟车丸).
- Common herbs: Raw rhubarb, fried fructus aurantii immaturus, magnolia officinalis, mirabilite, kansui, euphorbia officinalis, black crown, poke root, eaglewood, wartwort, bunge pricklyash seed, and gourd.

Tonifying the Middle-Burner and Qi: (补中益气法): I used for when there is spleen and blood deficiency, and Qi can't transform dampness.

- Symptoms: faint yellow complexion, shortness of breath, nausea, blood in the stool, difficulty defecating, muscle weakness, whiteness on the tongue, and a thin, floating pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Tonifying the middle-burner and Qi decoction (补中益气汤)
- Common herbs: codonopsis pilosula, roasted astragalus, atractylodes macrocephala, roasted licorice, yam, and tangerine peel. For Qi deficiency, add: cimicifuga and bupleurum. For bleeding, add: angelica, agrimonia pilosa, and donkey hide gelatin. For lower burner dampness add: poria cocos and rhizoma dioscoreae.

Tonify the spleen and moving the Middle-burner (健脾运中法) : is used for when dampness accumulates in a deficient spleen.

- Symptoms: malaise, weakness in the stomach and spleen, and it may often be coupled with diabetes.
- Common prescriptions: Cān líng bái shù sǎn (参苓白术散)、Xiāng shā liù jūn zǐ decoction (香砂六君子汤)、and Zhǐ shù pills (枳术丸).
- Common herbs: Codonopsis pilosula, atractylodes macrocephala, poria cocos, liquorice, yam, fructus aurantii immaturus, and coix seed. For Qi deficiency add astragalus. For stomach distention add fructus aurantii.

Nourishing the stomach and cultivating Yin method (益胃养阴法): is used for when the spleen and stomach's Yin have been damaged.

- Symptoms: overly pensive, digestive disorders, loss of appetite, dry mouth, nausea, redness on the tongue, and a rapid pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Yīguàn jiān (一贯煎) and Shā cān mài dōng decoction (沙参麦冬汤).
- Common herbs: Radix Glehniae, Radix Ophiopogonis, polygonatum odoratum, Dendrobium, trichosanthen, Radix Paeoniae Alba, and Glycyrrhiza uralensis. For stomach heat, add rhizoma coptidis. For Qi stagnation add roses. For anorexia add grain buds and malt.

Tonifying the spleen and warming the middle burner method (健脾温中法): is used for when spleen Yang is deficient and declining.

- Symptoms: white coating on the tongue, sunken pulse, preference for hot drinks, pale complexion, and loose stools.
- Common prescriptions: Guì fù lǐ zhōng decoction (桂附理中汤).
- Common herbs: Aconite, cinnamon, dried ginger, codonopsis pilosula, atractylodes macrocephala, roasted licorice, amomum villosum, and piper orange.

Transform dampness and opening collaterals method (化痰通络法): is used for when qi stagnation causes stasis in the collaterals.

- Symptoms: spleen Qi doesn't rise; liver cirrhosis, malaria, liver diseases, and maybe even an abdominal tumor.
- Common prescriptions: áo hé chéng qì decoction (桃核承气汤)、xuè fǔ zhú yū decoction (血府逐瘀汤)、and biē jiǎ jiān pills (鳖甲煎丸).
- Common herbs: Frankincense, myrrh, pollen Typhae, peach kernel, safflower, angelica, zedoary, and turtle shell. For bleeding add ginseng, cuttlefish bone, and bletilla.

Tonifying the spleen and soothing the liver method (健脾舒肝法) : is used for spleen deficiency and liver depression.

- Symptoms: Abdominal pain, depression, breast pain, dysmenorrhea, thin tongue coating, and a stringy, thin pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Liù jūn zǐ decoction (六君子汤) and Xiāoyáo pills (逍遥丸).
- Common herbs: Radix Bupleuri, radix Paeoniae alba, codonopsis pilosula, poria cocos, roasted licorice, fried fructus aurantii, rhizoma cyperi, and rhizoma atractylodis. For stomach distension add amomum villosum.

Tonifying the spleen and harmonizing the stomach method (健脾和胃法): is used for disharmony between the stomach and the spleen.

- Symptoms: stomach distension, abrupt pain, difficulty digesting food, sour smell, nausea, abdominal distension, loose stools, white and greasy tongue, and a thread-like pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Bǎo hé pills (保和丸) and Xiāng shā liù jūn zǐ decoction (香砂六君子汤)
- Common herbs: Radix aucklandiae, amomum villosum, codonopsis pilosula, atractylodes macrocephala, radix glycyrrhizae, pinellia ternata, pericarpium citri reticulatae, shenqu, hawthorn, fructus aurantii, and semen raphani.

Soothing the liver and harmonizing the stomach method (疏肝和胃法): is used for when the liver and stomach are disharmonious.

- Symptoms: epigastric distension pain, rough belching, sour vomit, lumpy stools, thin and greasy moss on the tongue, and a stringy pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Sì nì sǎn (四逆散) and Zuǒ jīn pills (左金丸).
- Common herbs: Radix Bupleuri, radix paeoniae alba, fructus aurantii, glycyrrhiza uralensis, coptis chinensis, evodia rutaecarpa, rhizoma cyperi, rhizoma corydalis, and calcined corruga seed. For nausea caused by liver Qi invading the stomach, add almonds, coptis chinensis, and perilla leaf.

Suppressing the liver and strengthening the spleen method (抑肝扶脾法): is used for when the liver and spleen are disharmonious.

- Symptoms: stomach pain, diarrhea, difficulty defecating, yellow coating on the tongue, and a stringy pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Tòng xiè yào fāng (痛泻要方).
- Common herbs: Atractylodes macrocephala, radix paeoniae alba, pericarpium citri reticulatae, radix saposhnikoviae, prunus mume, and rose. For spleen deficiency add Chinese yam and rhubarb.

Cultivation of earth to generate metal method (培土生金法): is used for spleen deficiency coincides with weakness in the lungs.

- Symptoms: loss of appetite, abdominal distension, malaise, loose stools, white coating on the tongue, and a thin, stringy pulse.
- Common prescriptions: Cān líng bái shù sǎn (参苓白术散) and Liù jūn zǐ decoction (六君子汤).
- Common herbs: Codonopsis pilosula, atractylodes macrocephala, poria cocos, liquorice, yam, and platycodon grandiflorum.

Language Focus:

1. 脾主运化 Pí zhǔ yùn huà
2. 脾统血 Pí tǒng xuè
3. 脾恶湿 Pí è shī
4. 脾合胃 Pí hé wèi
5. 脾主四肢肌肉 Pí zhǔ sìzhī jīròu
6. 《灵枢·师传篇》曰：胃欲寒饮，肠欲热饮，两者相逆，便之奈何？“Líng shū·shī chuán piān” yuē: Wèi yù hán yǐn, cháng yù rè yǐn, liǎng zhě xiāng nì, biàn zhī nàihé?

7. 噎膈 Yē gé
8. 四饮 Sì yǐn
9. 痰饮 Tán yǐn
10. 悬饮 Xuán yǐn
11. 溢饮 Yì yǐn
12. 支饮 Zhī yǐn
13. 湿热 Shī rè
14. 三热 Sān rè
15. 干热 Gān rè
16. 瘀热 Yū rè
17. 温中燥湿法 Wēn zhōng zào shī fǎ
18. 清热化湿法 Qīng rè huà shī fǎ
19. 攻逐水湿法 Gōng zhú shuǐ shī fǎ
20. 补中益气法 Bǔ zhōng yì qì fǎ
21. 健脾运中法 Jiàn pí yùn zhōng fǎ
22. 益胃养阴法 Yì wèi yǎng yīn fǎ
23. 健脾温中法 Jiàn pí wēn zhōng fǎ
24. 化瘀通络法 Huà yū tōng luò fǎ
25. 健脾舒肝法 Jiàn pí shū gān fǎ
26. 健脾和胃法 Jiàn pí hé wèi fǎ
27. 疏肝和胃法 Shū gān hé wèi fǎ
28. 抑肝扶脾法 Yì gān fú pí fǎ
29. 培土生金法 Péi tǔ shēng jīn fǎ

Sources:

- [1] Huangdi Neijingsu asked [M]. Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 2005: 11,93.
- [2] Difficulties [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan Science and Technology Press, 2008: 160-166.
- [3] Lingshu Jing [M]. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2006: 133-136.
- [4] Zhang Lu. Qian Jin Fang Yanyi [M]. Beijing: China Traditional Chinese Medicine Publishing House, 1995: 366-367.
- [5] Xie Yinglu. Xie Yinglu Medical Case [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Science and Technology Press, 2010: 95 .
- [6] 周仲瑛. 中医内科学: 脾系病证概要[J/OL]. 南京中医药大学学报.