

BLOOD STASIS

Blood stasis is a common and damaging pathogenic factor that is at the root of many serious diseases. A characteristic of Blood stasis is that it can only occur after a prolonged period of time: thus, it is always a relatively serious pathogenic factor and one that leads to more serious diseases than Qi stagnation: for example, coronary heart disease, abdominal masses, tumours, high blood pressure, stroke, etc. By definition, Qi stagnation cannot, by itself, cause any of the above problems. Thus, whenever we see signs of Blood stasis, we know that the condition is one of long duration and the prognosis is less good than that for Qi stagnation.

1. AETIOLOGY

Blood stasis never arises independently (like Qi stagnation) but is always the consequence of other conditions, usually after a long period of time. Thus, there are no aetiological factors (diet, emotions, etc.) that give rise to Blood stasis by themselves as Blood stasis itself arises from other conditions. The conditions giving rise to Blood stasis are as follows:

- Qi stagnation - LIV - HE
- Internal Cold - Uterus - ST - HE
- Heat or Fire - ST - INT - HE - LIV - UT
- Qi deficiency - ST - HE
- Blood deficiency - Uterus - HE, LIV
- Phlegm - ST - INT - Uterus

2. PATHOLOGY

Blood is related to Qi and to Body Fluids. It is related to Qi first of all because Blood itself is a (very dense) form of Qi and secondly because it relies on Qi for its movement. "Qi is the commander of Blood; when Qi moves, Blood moves. Blood is the mother of Qi; where Blood goes, Qi goes". On the other hand, Blood is part of Body Fluids and is formed from them (with the participation of Gu Qi). Thus, both Qi and Body Fluids pathology may play a role in Blood stasis. For example, Qi stagnation is a very common cause of Blood stasis, while a pathology of the Body Fluids, such as Phlegm, may also lead to Blood stasis. Another pathology of Body Fluids leading to Blood stasis occurs when Heat or Fire condense the Body Fluids and make the blood more dense, leading to Blood stasis. We can review the pathology of the various causes of Blood stasis.

1) Qi stagnation

Qi is the commander of Blood and Blood relies on the pushing action of Qi for its movement; any Qi stagnation may lead to Blood stasis after some time.

2) Internal Cold

Both Full Cold and Empty Cold obstruct the movement of Qi and Yang and may lead to Blood stasis; this also occurs because Cold congeals Blood.

3) Heat or Fire

Heat or Fire injure and condense the body fluids and therefore Blood since Blood is part of body fluids. This may occur in the Heart, Liver, Stomach, Lungs, Intestines and Uterus.

4) Qi deficiency

Qi deficiency may lead to Blood stasis because deficient Qi fails to move and transport and may lead to Qi stagnation and Blood stasis.

5) Blood deficiency

Blood deficiency may also lead to Blood stasis because Blood is the mother of Qi, when Blood is deficient, Qi is also usually deficient, Qi fails to move Blood and Blood stasis ensues. A simultaneous Blood deficiency and stasis is more common in women.

6) Phlegm

There is a strong interaction between Phlegm and Blood stasis as both are pathologies of Body Fluids. Phlegm is a pathological accumulation of turbid fluids, while Blood stasis is a pathological accumulation of Blood; since there is an interchange between Blood and Body Fluids, Blood stasis and Phlegm interact with each other and aggravate each other. A simultaneous condition of Blood stasis and Phlegm is common in the elderly and it is a particular pernicious combination leading to serious diseases which are difficult to treat.

The first three aetiological factors are the most important ones.

CONSEQUENCES OF BLOOD STASIS

Blood stasis can itself become a cause of disease. The four consequences of Blood stasis may be:

- Blood deficiency
- Bleeding
- Dryness
- Qi deficiency

3. DIAGNOSIS

The main manifestations of Blood stasis are:

- Pain
- Swellings, lumps, tumours, masses
- Colour purple
- Purple tongue
- Dark complexion
- Dry nails and hair
- Bleeding
- Maculae
- Stiffness
- Dreaming a lot
- Poor memory
- Dark moles
- Dark eye sockets
- Purple nose bridge
- Purple venules visible under the skin, often on the legs
- Umbilicus bulging out
- Hardness of the abdomen on palpation
- Enlarged ends of fingers and toes
- Skin not elastic, lustreless, dark, scaly, dry
- A history of chronic illness with repeated bouts
- Adhesions and scars from surgery
- Poor memory
- Pulse. The pulse indicating Blood stasis may be Wiry, Firm or Choppy
- Irregular periods, painful periods with dark clots, hesitant start to periods, periods starting and stopping, infertility
- Fever (sometimes)
- Mental restlessness

- Thirst with desire to gargle but not to swallow
- Abdominal pain

4. TREATMENT PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

a) BEN-BIAO and XU-SHI

Blood stasis is always the Manifestation (Biao) of a condition because it arises from other conditions such as Qi stagnation, Cold, Heat, etc. Blood stasis is a Full condition by definition. Thus, the question arises how to approach a patient who suffers from Blood stasis (Full-Biao) but also from an underlying condition that is the Ben (which, itself, may be Xu or Shi).

The Ben of Blood stasis may be a Deficiency (of Qi or Blood) or a Fullness (Cold, Heat or Phlegm). Thus, treating Ben consists in either tonifying Qi and Blood or in scattering Cold, clearing Heat or resolving Phlegm. Since Blood stasis is always a chronic condition, generally speaking one needs to treat both Ben and Biao simultaneously. However, especially when herbal medicine is used, the question arises whether one should start with a formula to invigorate Blood modifying it to treat the Ben, or start with a formula to treat the Ben modifying it to invigorate Blood. The answer is simple: in more acute cases when the symptoms and signs of Blood stasis predominate, start with a modification of a formula to invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis; in more chronic cases when the symptoms and signs of Blood stasis are less pronounced, start with a modification of a formula that treats Ben. My personal inclination, however, is always to clear pathogenic factors first, i.e. in the case, invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis.

b) HERBAL TREATMENT

Invigorating Blood is such an important method of treatment in gynaecology and other disorders that Tang Zong Hai, author of the "Discussion on Blood Syndromes" (1884), said: "In Blood syndromes one must always eliminate stasis of Blood".

There are many herbs that eliminate stasis of Blood and it is therefore useful to differentiate them by assigning them to categories as follows.

i. Herbs that invigorate Blood

Chuan Xiong Radix Ligustici Chuanxiong, Yan Hu Suo Rhizoma Corydalis Yanhusuo, Yu Jin Tuber Curcumae, Ru Xiang Gummi Olibanum, Mo Yao Myrrha, Wang Bu Liu Xing Semen Vaccariae segetalis.

ii. Herbs that invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis

Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae, Yi Mu Cao Herba Leonori heterophylli, Tao Ren Semen Persicae, Hong Hua Flos Carthami tinctorii, Chuan Niu Xi Radix Cyathulae, Ze Lan Herba Lycopi lucidi, Su Mu Lignum Sappan.

iii. Herbs that break-up Blood and eliminate stasis

E Zhu Rhizoma Curcumae zedoariae, San Leng Rhizoma Sparganii stoloniferii, Shui Zhi Hirudo seu Whitmania, Meng Chong Tabanus bivittatus, Di Bie Chong Eupolyphaga seu Opisthoplatia, listed here in ascending order of strength. These herbs are particularly strong and are said to "break up" (rather than "invigorate") Blood. Herbs that break up Blood are suitable to dissolve masses from stasis of Blood and should be used with great care and sparingly.

Practically all Blood-invigorating herbs are contraindicated in pregnancy: unless absolutely necessary, it is strongly recommended that they are not given to a pregnant patient. The only

Blood-invigorating herbs that might be relatively safe to use in pregnancy are Chi Shao Radix Paeoniae rubrae, Si Gua Luo Fasciculus vascularis Luffae, Ji Xue Teng Radix et Caulis Jixueteng and Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae.

It may be useful to classify the Blood-invigorating herbs according to their target area/organ:

Mind: Dan Shen.

Head: Chuan Xiong.

Breasts: Wang Bu Liu Xing, Mo Yao, Chuan Shan Jia, Si Gua Luo, Hong Hua.

Chest: Yu Jin, Dan Shen.

Lower back and knees: Ji Xue Teng, Chuan Niu Xi.

Epigastrium: Yan Hu Suo, Yu Jin, Lu Lu Tong, Wu Ling Zhi.

Uterus: Yan Hu Suo, Yi Mu Cao, Ze Lan, Chi Shao, Hong Hua, Tao Ren, San Leng, Su Mu, Wu Ling Zhi, Di Bie Chong.

Lower abdomen: Yan Hu Suo, Tao Ren, San Leng, Di Bie Chong.

Bladder: Yi Mu Cao, Ze Lan.

Finally, something should be said about the complex pharmacology of the Bloodinvigorating herbs which makes them some of the most useful herbs in the Chinese pharmacopoeia. The pharmacological actions of these herbs may be summarized as follows:

- They improve the dynamics of blood flow and dilate the peripheral, coronary, cerebral, renal and mesenteric arteries.
- They improve microcirculation. Disturbance of microcirculation causes many diseases such as coronary heart disease, angiitis, endometriosis, chronic hepatitis, hepatic cirrhosis and scleroderma.
- They improve concentration, coagulation and accumulation of blood and prevent thrombosis by inhibiting accumulation of platelets.
- They influence connective tissues and can treat diseases of these tissues such as skin warts, burn scars and adhesions.
- They readjust cellular and humoral immunity.
- They have an analgesic effect.
- They increase uterine contractions.
- They combat inflammation and bacterial infection.

c) ACUPUNCTURE

The main points to pacify the Liver and eliminate stasis of Blood are the same as those that eliminate stagnation of Liver-Qi, i.e. LIV-3 Taichong (this is the main one), G.B.-14 Yanglingquan, LIV-14 Qimen, LIV-13 Zhangmen, G.B.-26 Daimai, and LIV-5 Ligou. These points should be needled with reducing or even method. In addition, two points which specifically invigorate Blood are BL-17 Geshu (with needle, no moxa) and SP-10 Xuehai.

5. THREE TREASURES REMEDIES FOR BLOOD STASIS

RED STIRRING

This is a variation of Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang Blood Mansion Eliminating Stasis Decoction. It invigorate Blood in the chest, Heart and Mind. It can be used for Chest Bi from Blood stasis and chest pain. However, it acts on the Upper Burner and it may therefore also be used for

pain from Blood stasis in the chest and head. Finally, it also calms the Mind when this is affected by Blood stasis.

STIR FIELD OF ELIXIR

This is a variation of Ge Xia Zhu Yu Tang Eliminating Stasis Below the Diaphragm Decoction. It is used for Blood stasis in the Lower Burner. This is very common in women. It may therefore be used for painful periods from Blood stasis.

INVIGORATE BLOOD AND STEM THE FLOW

This is a very useful remedy in gynaecological conditions. It simultaneously invigorate Blood and stops bleeding. This action is very useful as bleeding from Blood stasis is a common occurrence in gynaecological conditions. For example, this occurs frequently in endometriosis when the periods are very painful and the menstrual blood has dark clots (Blood stasis) but the periods are also heavy. Paradoxically, Blood stasis may aggravate heavy bleeding as the stagnant blood obstructs the uterus so that new blood has nowhere to go and leaks out. In all these cases, the remedy Invigorate Blood and Stem the Flow is very useful.. It is best used in phases 4 and 1.

HARMONIZING THE MOON

This remedy is specific for endometriosis. It not only invigorate Blood but it also "breaks" Blood and dissolves masses. It is used for endometriosis because the endometriosis lesions are considered a form of Abdominal Masses (zheng jia) from Blood stasis.

CLEAR THE ROOT

Clear the Root is not specific for Blood stasis as it also resolves Phlegm and Dampness and clears Heat. However, it also invigorates Blood in the prostate.

Endnotes

1. Cited in Li Fei, Discussion about Formulae to Invigorate Blood and Eliminate Stasis, in Journal of the Nanjing College of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Nanjing Zhong Yi Xue Yuan Xue).
2. There are actually several terms used to say "eliminate stasis": qu yu, hua yu and zhu yu. Qu yu means to "eliminate" or "dispel" stasis, hua yu means to "resolve" stasis and zhu yu means to "drive out" or "expel" stasis. The first and the third are the same except for a difference of degree, the latter being stronger. The second, hua yu, "resolving stasis" indicates a different way of eliminating stasis.
3. Journal of Chinese Medicine (Zhong Yi Za Zhi), Vol. 32, no. 12, p. 4.
4. Cited in Li Fei, Discussion about Formulae to Invigorate Blood and Eliminate Stasis, p. 43.
5. Ibid., p. 43.
6. Ibid., p. 43.
7. Shang Xian Min 1990 Practical Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacology, p. 227.