

PHLEGM

The concept of Phlegm is very wide-ranging and important in Chinese Medicine. Phlegm is extremely frequent in clinical practice and is at the same time a pathological condition and an aetiological factor. Phlegm which is retained over a long period of time becomes itself a cause of disease.

Cause of Phlegm

The main cause of Phlegm is Spleen deficiency. If the Spleen fails to transform and transport Body Fluids, these will accumulate and change into Phlegm. The Lungs and Kidneys are also involved in the formation of Phlegm. If the Lungs fail to disperse and lower fluids and if the Kidneys fail to transform and excrete fluids, these may accumulate into Phlegm. However, the Spleen is always the primary factor in the formation of Phlegm.

Signs of Phlegm

The essential signs of Phlegm are a Swollen tongue body with a sticky tongue coating and a Slippery or Wiry pulse.

Types of Phlegm

There are two types of Phlegm, one "substantial", one "non-substantial". In the old classics, these were described as Phlegm "having a form" and Phlegm "without a form".

Substantial Phlegm can be seen, such as the sputum that collects in the Lungs and is spat during bronchitis or other Lung diseases.

Non-substantial Phlegm can be retained subcutaneously or in the channels. It can obstruct the Heart-orifices or the Gall-Bladder or Kidneys in the form of stones. It can settle in the joints in the form of arthritic bone deformities.

Phlegm patterns

The patterns caused by Phlegm are as follows:

- Wind-Phlegm
- Phlegm-Heat
- Cold-Phlegm
- Damp-Phlegm
- Dry-Phlegm
- Qi-Phlegm
- Food-Phlegm
- Phlegm with Blood stasis
- Phlegm-Fluids
- Phlegm Under the Skin
- Phlegm in the Channels
- Phlegm misting the Heart
- Phlegm in the Joints
- Phlegm in the Gall-Bladder
- Phlegm in the Kidneys
- Shock-Phlegm
- Wine-Phlegm

Wind-Phlegm

Severe dizziness, nausea, vomiting, numbness of the limbs, coughing of phlegm, a feeling of oppression of the chest, blurred vision, a rattling sound in the throat, slurred speech, Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Wiry-Slippery pulse. In case of Wind-Stroke: aphasia, deviation of eyes and mouth, hemiplegia, Swollen-Deviated tongue.

Three Treasures remedies: Clear Yang, Peaceful Sunset (in the case of Wind-Stroke)

Phlegm-Heat

Cough with expectoration of profuse yellow sputum which may be blood-tinged, a feeling of

oppression of the chest, dark eye sockets, red cheek bones, red face, thirst, oily skin, breathlessness, chest pain, insomnia, dark urine, feeling of heat, mental restlessness, Red-Swollen tongue with sticky-yellow coating, Rapid-Slippery pulse.

Three Treasures remedies: Ringing Metal, Clear the Soul

Cold-Phlegm

Cough with expectoration of white-watery sputum, feeling cold, cold hands and feet, nausea, vomiting, a feeling of oppression of the chest and epigastrium, dull-white complexion, pale urine, Pale-Swollen tongue with wet-white coating, Slippery-Slow pulse.

Three Treasures remedies: Limpid Sea

Damp-Phlegm

Cough with easy expectoration of profuse, sticky-white sputum, a feeling of oppression of the chest and epigastrium, breathlessness, rattling sound in the throat, dark eye sockets, sallow-greyish complexion, a feeling of heaviness, tendency to obesity, swollen hands and feet, poor appetite, nausea, dizziness, blurred vision, oily skin, Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Slippery pulse.

Three Treasures remedies: Limpid Sea

Dry-Phlegm

Sputum in the chest that is difficult to expectorate, bouts of dry cough followed by expectoration of sticky sputum, breathlessness, dull-white complexion, dark eye sockets, dry throat, dry nose and lips, dry mouth but no desire to drink, Swollen tongue with sticky-dry coating, Slippery pulse.

Three Treasures remedy: Limpid Sea and Jade Spring

Qi-Phlegm

A feeling of lump in the throat, difficulty in swallowing, a feeling of oppression of the chest and diaphragm, mental depression, irritability, nausea, sighing, Wiry pulse.

Three Treasures remedy: Open the Heart

Food-Phlegm

Cough with abundant sputum, nausea, vomiting, sour regurgitation, belching, a feeling of fullness in the epigastrium, a feeling of oppression of the chest and epigastrium, epigastric pain after eating that is better after bowel movement, Swollen tongue with thick-sticky tongue coating, Slippery pulse.

Phlegm with Blood Stasis

A feeling of oppression of the chest, numbness and tingling of the limbs, pain in the joints, stiffness and rigidity of joints, abdominal masses, fibroids, goitre, mental restlessness, insomnia, dark eye sockets, Purple-Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Slippery-Wiry or Slippery-Firm pulse.

Three Treasures remedies: Peaceful Sunset or Clear the Soul with Red Stirring

Phlegm-Fluids

Phlegm-Fluids in Stomach and Intestines (Tan Yin): abdominal fullness and distension, nausea, vomiting of watery fluids, splashing sound in the stomach, dry mouth without desire to drink, palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, a feeling of oppression of the chest, loose stools, loss of weight, Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Deep-Wiry or Deep-Slippery pulse.

Phlegm-Fluids in the hypochondrium (Xuan Yin): hypochondrial pain which is worse on coughing and breathing, a feeling of distension and pulling of the hypochondrium, shortness of breath, Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Deep-Slippery-Wiry pulse.

Phlegm-Fluids in the limbs (Yi Yin): a feeling of heaviness of the body, pain in the

muscles, absence of sweating, no desire to drink, cough with profuse watery sputum, swelling of the limbs, lethargy, breathlessness, Swollen tongue with sticky coating, Wiry-Slippery or Tight-Slippery pulse.

Phlegm-Fluids above the diaphragm (Zhi Yin): cough with white-watery sputum, breathlessness, swelling of limbs, dizziness, inability to lie down, swollen face, feeling cold, Swollen tongue with white-sticky coating, Slippery pulse.

Phlegm Under the Skin

Lumps or nodules under the skin, nerve-ganglia swellings, swelling of lymph-nodes, swelling of the thyroid, lipoma.

Phlegm in the Channels

Numbness and tingling in the limbs.

Phlegm Misting the Heart

Inappropriate laughter or crying, dull thinking, hypomania, manic behaviour, manic depression, psychosis.

Three Treasures remedies: Clear the Soul

Phlegm in the Joints

Swelling and deformities of joints seen in Chronic Painful Obstruction Syndrome (often seen in rheumatoid arthritis).

Three Treasures remedies: Benefit the Sinews

Phlegm in the Gall Bladder

Gall-Bladder stones.

Phlegm in the Kidneys

Kidney stones.

Shock-Phlegm

Pain in the heart region, a feeling of oppression in the chest, anxiety, mental restlessness following a shock, Moving pulse. This pattern occurs when a severe shock displaces the Spirit from the Heart and its place is taken by Phlegm.

Three Treasures remedy: Clear the Soul

Wine-Phlegm

Nausea, vomiting, a feeling of fullness of the epigastrium, foul breath, a rattling sound in the throat, purple nose, purple complexion, a feeling of oppression of the chest, Reddish-Purple and Swollen tongue with a sticky-yellow coating, Slippery pulse. This pattern is seen in older people with Phlegm deriving from excessive alcohol consumption.

Three Treasures remedy: Peaceful Sunset

THREE TREASURES REMEDIES USED IN THE TREATMENT OF PHLEGM

Limpid Sea

Pattern: Phlegm (damp, cold or hot) in the Middle and Upper Burner

Actions: Dry Dampness and resolve Phlegm

Indications: Cough with abundant sputum, catarrh in the chest, nose or throat, white or yellow sputum, a feeling of oppression of the chest, nausea, vomiting, palpitations, dizziness, insomnia, lipoma.

Tongue: Pale, swollen with a sticky-white coating in case of Damp- or Cold-Phlegm, or red,

swollen with a sticky-yellow coating in case of Hog-Phlegm.

Pulse: Slippery and slow in case of Cold-Phlegm, or slippery and rapid in case of Hot-Phlegm.

Ringing Metal

Pattern: Phlegm-Heat in the Lungs

Action: resolve Phlegm, clear Heat, restore the descending of Lung-Qi, stop cough

Indications: acute cough with expectoration of profuse, yellow sputum following an upper respiratory infection, a feeling of oppression of the chest, fever, thirst, insomnia, feeling of heat, red cheeks

Tongue: normal, red or red only in the front with a thick-sticky-yellow coating

Pulse: Slippery-Rapid

Clear the Soul

Pattern: Phlegm-Heat obstructing the chest and Mind, Lung-Qi not descending

Action: Resolves Phlegm-Heat, calms the Mind, open the orifices, relaxes the chest

Indications: Anxiety, a feeling of oppression of the chest and epigastrium, palpitations, a bitter-sticky taste, sighing, feeling un-easy, phlegm in the chest, poor digestion, slight nausea, insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, dull complexion, mental restlessness, depression, jumpiness, a fluttered feeling in the heart region, vomiting, dizziness, pre-menstrual tension

Tongue: Red or normal, swollen, sticky-yellow coating, Stomach crack or Stomach-Heat crack with rough yellow coating inside it

Pulse: Slippery, rapid. The Heart pulse may feel relatively Overflowing

Benefit the Sinews

Pattern: Blood stasis, Phlegm and Dampness in the joints, Kidney deficiency

Action: invigorate Blood, resolve Phlegm, expel Wind-Dampness, dry Dampness

Indications: chronic Painful Obstruction Syndrome, chronic joint pain with swelling of the joints and bone deformities, rigidity of joints, backache, dizziness, tinnitus, tiredness, lack of will-power, mental confusion, anxiety, mental restlessness

Tongue: Pale, red or purple, swollen, sticky coating

Pulse: Choppy or slightly Slippery

Clear Yang

Pattern: Liver-Yang rising, Phlegm clouding the head, Blood deficiency, Kidney Yang deficiency

Action: Subdue Liver-Yang, extinguish Liver-Wind, resolve Phlegm, nourish Blood, tonify Kidney-Yang, tonify Spleen-Qi

Indications: Headaches which may be throbbing or dull in nature, dizziness, a feeling of heaviness and muzziness of the head which is worse in the morning, catarrh, a feeling of oppression of the chest, nausea, a sticky taste, blurred vision, vomiting during migraine attacks, tics, high blood pressure

Tongue: Pale or normal-coloured, swollen, sticky-white, coating.

Pulse: Weak and slightly Slippery

Peaceful Sunset

Pattern: Liver-Fire, Liver-Wind, Blood-Heat, Liver-Phlegm-Heat, Blood stasis

Action: Clear Liver-Fire, subdue Liver-Wind, resolve Phlegm, clear Heat, cool Blood, move Blood

Indications: Insomnia, dizziness, tinnitus, trigeminal neuralgia, headaches, coughing up phlegm, constipation, thirst, chest pains, purpura, high blood pressure

Tongue: Reddish-purple, stiff, dry-thick-sticky coating. Possibly moving or deviated.

Pulse: Full, slippery and wiry.

TABLE TO COMPARE THREE TREASURES REMEDIES WHICH TREAT PHLEGM

	Type of Phlegm	Symptoms	Tongue and pulse	Frequently combined patterns
Limpid Sea	Damp-Phlegm Cold-Phlegm	Cough with sputum, catarrh, overweight, oppression of the chest	Swollen and with a sticky-coating Slippery	Spleen- and Kidney deficiency
Ringing Metal	Phlegm-Heat	Acute cough with yellow sputum	Thick-sticky-yellow tongue coating, Slippery-Rapid pulse	Spleen- and Lung-Qi deficiency
Clear the Soul	Phlegm-Heat	Anxiety, oppression of the chest, depression, chronic cough with yellow sputum	Swollen tongue with a sticky coating and a Stomach or Heart crack. Slippery-Rapid pulse (Heart position) Overflowing	Lung-Qi not descending
Benefit the Sinews	Phlegm in the joints	Chronic joint pain, swelling of joints and bone deformities	Swollen tongue with sticky coating; Choppy or slightly Slippery pulse	Blood stasis, Kidney deficiency
Peaceful Sunset	Wind-Phlegm	Insomnia, constipation, dizziness, high blood pressure	Reddish-Purple, stiff tongue with sticky coating; Full, Slippery or Wiry pulse	Liver-Fire, Liver-Wind, Blood stasis
Clear Yang	Wind-Phlegm	Headaches, dizziness, heaviness of head	Swollen tongue with a sticky coating; Weak or slightly Slippery pulse	Liver-Yang rising, Blood deficiency, Kidney-Yang deficiency

CASE HISTORIES

Case History 1

A 32-year-old woman had suffered from an acute cough with profuse yellow sputum since a respiratory infection three months previously. Her chest felt tight and she was hotter than normal, complaining of a "funny taste" in her mouth and an extreme thirst. The cough was particularly bad at night. Her tongue had a sticky-yellow coating and her pulse was Slippery and slightly Rapid.

I prescribed Ringing Metal (8 tablets a day). The patient took them for three weeks, after which time the cough had totally cleared up. I combined this with acupuncture to strengthen Spleen- and Lung-Qi, both of which had been weakened over the three months since the infection.

Case History 2

A 25-year-old woman had suffered from benign vertigo since childhood. She experienced periods of intense dizziness, when she felt "the world was literally spinning around her". The dizziness was sometimes so severe as to make her lose her balance. She also felt nauseous during the attacks. In between times, she felt extremely tired and weak. Her tongue was a normal colour with a sticky coating, while her pulse was Wiry on the right and Choppy on the left.

I prescribed Clear Yang (6 tablets a day between attacks and 9 tablets a day during attacks). At the same time, I gave her acupuncture to subdue Liver-Yang, resolve Phlegm, nourish Blood and strengthen the Kidneys. After six months of treatment, the attacks are less frequent and less severe. She also has more energy. The patient has found if she takes a high dose of Clear Yang as soon as she senses an attack beginning, she can sometimes stop it from materializing or it lasts a shorter time than it previously would have.

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