

SPLEEN-QI TONICS

Spleen-Qi deficiency is the most common pattern encountered in clinical practice. Our hectic modern life style and erratic diet almost inevitably conduce to a Spleen-Qi deficiency. I shall review the main Deficiency patterns of the Spleen which are all variations of Spleen-Qi deficiency. The patterns are:

- Spleen-Qi deficiency
- Spleen-Yang deficiency
- Spleen-Blood deficiency
- Spleen-Qi sinking
- Spleen not controlling Blood
- Spleen-Yin deficiency

It is a special characteristic of the Spleen deficiency patterns that these are all variations of Spleen-Qi deficiency: each pattern highlights a particular aspect of the pathology of Spleen-Qi deficiency.

SPLEEN-QI DEFICIENCY

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, slight depression, tendency to obesity, Pale tongue, Empty pulse.

Acupuncture: Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-3 Taibai, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, BL-20 Pishu, BL-21 Weishu.

Prescription: Si Jun Zi Tang Four Gentlemen Decoction or Liu Jun Zi Tang Six Gentlemen Decoction.
Three Treasures formula: Prosperous Earth, Soothe the Centre

Comment

Prosperous Earth is the main formula to tonify the Spleen: it is a variation of Liu Jun Zi Tang (Six Gentlemen Decoction). It can be used in all cases of Spleen-Qi or Spleen-Yang deficiency. As this pattern often coexists with others, this remedy is frequently combined with others. For example, if, in addition to Spleen-Qi deficiency there is also Dampness, Prosperous Earth can be combined with Drain Fields.

Soothe the Centre can also be used to tonify Spleen-Qi but only when this is accompanied by Dampness and Qi stagnation in the Middle Burner. Therefore the pulse and tongue corresponding to Soothe the Centre are different than those corresponding to Prosperous Earth: the tongue would be Pale but with a relatively thick-sticky coating while the pulse would be Weak but also Slippery, or Soggy.

SPLEEN- YANG DEFICIENCY

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, slight depression, tendency to obesity, feeling cold, cold limbs, oedema, Pale and wet tongue, Deep-Weak pulse.

Acupuncture: Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-3 Taibai, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, BL-20 Pishu, BL-21 Weishu, SP-9 Yinlingquan, Ren-9 Shuifen, BL-22 Sanjiaoshu, ST-28 Shuidao, Ren-11 Jianli, ST-22 Guanmen. Moxa is applicable.

Prescription: Li Zhong Tang Regulating the Centre Decoction.

Three Treasures remedy: Prosperous Earth can be used to tonify Spleen-Yang as well as Spleen-Qi.

SPLEEN-BLOOD DEFICIENCY

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, dull-pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, depression, thin body, scanty periods or amenorrhoea, insomnia, joint ache, Pale and Thin tongue, Choppy or Fine pulse.

Acupuncture: Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-3 Taibai, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, BL-20 Pishu, BL-21 Weishu, Ren-4 Guanyuan, BL-17 Geshu (with direct moxa).

Prescription: Gui Pi Tang Tonifying the Spleen Decoction.

Three Treasures formula: Calm the Shen

Comments

This pattern describes the pathology of deficient Spleen-Qi not making enough Blood (as Gu Qi of the Spleen is the precursor of Blood) and leading to Blood deficiency.

Calm the Shen tonifies Spleen-Qi and Blood: therefore is used whenever Spleen-Qi deficiency leads to Blood deficiency, a situation that is extremely common in women. It also nourishes Heart-Blood and calms the Mind.

SPLEEN-QI SINKING

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, depression, tendency to obesity, a bearing-down sensation in the abdomen, prolapse of stomach, uterus, anus or bladder, frequency and urgency of urination, Pale tongue, Weak pulse.

Acupuncture: Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-3 Taibai, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, BL-20 Pishu, BL-21 Weishu, Du-20 Baihui, Ren-6 Qihai, ST-21 Liangmen, Du-1 Chengqiang. Moxa is applicable.

Prescription: Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang Tonifying the Centre and Benefiting Qi Decoction.

Three Treasures formula: Tonify Qi and Ease the Muscles, Breaking Clouds

Comments

This pattern describes the pathology of sinking of Spleen-Qi: this cannot occur without Spleen-Qi deficiency and it is a variation of it. When Spleen-Qi sinks there may a prolapse of an organ or chronic frequent urination.

Tonify Qi and Ease the Muscles is a variation of Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang which lifts Qi in cases of sinking of Qi: it also tonifies Spleen-Qi. This remedy can therefore be used to tonify Spleen-Qi and lift Qi in cases of sinking of Qi. This remedy is particularly suitable if, in addition to Spleen-Qi deficiency, there is also Dampness.

Breaking Clouds is also a variation of Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang and can be used to tonify Spleen-Qi and lift Qi in cases of sinking of Qi. It is particularly suitable if there is mental depression.

SPLEEN NOT CONTROLLING BLOOD

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, depression, tendency to obesity, blood spots under the skin, blood in the urine or stools, excessive uterine bleeding, sallow complexion, Pale tongue, Weak or Fine pulse.

Acupuncture: Ren-12 Zhongwan, ST-36 Zusanli, SP-3 Taibai, SP-6 Sanyinjiao, BL-20 Pishu, BL-21 Weishu, Du-20 Baihui, Ren-6 Qihai, BL-17 Geshu, SP-10 Xuehai, SP-1 Yinbai.

Prescription: Gui Pi Tang Tonifying the Spleen Decoction.

Three Treasures formula: Calm the Shen

Comments

This pattern describes the pathology of deficient Spleen-Qi being unable to hold blood in the blood vessels and leading to bleeding. This can be bleeding from any part of the body such as coughing of blood, nosebleed, vomiting of blood, blood in the stools, blood in the urine, excessive menstrual bleeding and bleeding under the skin.

Although Calm the Shen is aimed at treating insomnia and anxiety deriving from Blood deficiency, it can be used to tonify the Spleen's function of holding blood in order to stop bleeding because it is a variation of Gui Pi Tang. As this formula tonifies Spleen-Qi and enters the Blood portion, it can stop bleeding from Qi deficiency.

SPLEEN-YIN DEFICIENCY

Clinical manifestations: Poor appetite, poor digestion, retching, gnawing hunger, loss of taste, slight epigastric pain, dry mouth, dry lips, dry stools, thin body, night- sweating, sallow complexion with possibly red tip of the nose, tongue without coating, transversal cracks on the sides, Weak or Floating Empty pulse.

Acupuncture: ST-36 Zusanli, Ren-12 Zhongwan, SP-6 Sanyinjiao.

Prescription: Ma Zi Ren Wan Cannabis Pill, Wu Ren Wan Five-Seed Pill, Shen Ling Bai Zhu San Ginseng-Poria-Atractylodes Powder

Three Treasures formula: Central Mansion, Harmonize the Centre, Jade Spring

Comments

Spleen-Yin deficiency is not often mentioned but it does exist. First of all, it should be understood that the pattern of Spleen-Yin deficiency cannot exist without concurrent Spleen-Qi and Stomach-Yin deficiency. It is therefore a more advanced stage of Spleen-Qi deficiency and it is nearly always associated with Stomach-Yin deficiency. If we analyze the clinical manifestations, we can classify them as follows:

- Poor appetite, poor digestion, sallow complexion, Weak pulse: Spleen-Qi deficiency
- Retching, gnawing hunger, loss of taste, slight epigastric pain, tongue without coating: Stomach-Yin deficiency
- Dry lips, dry stools, red tip of nose, transversal cracks on the sides: Spleen-Yin deficiency
- Dry mouth: Stomach- and/or Spleen-Yin deficiency
- Thin body, night- sweating, Floating Empty pulse: general manifestations of Yin deficiency.

The most distinctive signs of Spleen-Yin deficiency are dry lips and small, transversal cracks on the sides of the tongue.

THE TONGUE IN STOMACH- AND SPLEEN-QI DEFICIENCY

The tongue coating is produced as a by-product of the Stomach's digestion. In the process of digesting the food, some "dirty Dampness" flows upwards to the tongue and forms the tongue coating. Therefore the presence of a tongue coating is normal and shows that the Stomach is functioning properly and Stomach-Qi is intact. A normal coating should be white and thin (thin enough to see the tongue-body colour through it). It is important to note that even if a coating is pathological (e.g. yellow and thick), the very presence of a coating shows that Stomach-Qi is intact. In the above example, the fact that the coating is thick and yellow would indicate that there is Stomach-Heat: however, the very presence of the coating shows that Stomach-Qi is intact and that, therefore, the pattern is a Full one.



Fig. 1. Coating with root (like grass)

The normal coating has a "root": the best way to describe this is with the analogy of grass (Fig. 1). The tongue coating is formed by filiform papillae (the ancient Chinese called them "fine hairs") which are very much like blades of grass rooted in soil. A coating with root indicates a good state of Stomach-Qi (even, I repeat, if it is pathological in terms of colour and thickness). To imagine a coating without root, we can think of a bare patch of soil onto which we spread grass cuttings: in such a case the blades of grass will lie on top of the soil and will not be rooted in it. The coating without root looks like it has been added or spread onto the tongue and not like it grows out of it (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Coating without root
(like grass clippings spread on bare soil)

The coating without root can take many different appearances and it may be variously described as looking like salt, snow or bean curd. A coating without root indicates a weakened Stomach-Qi and it is usually the first stage of a process that leads to Stomach-Yin deficiency when the tongue has no coating. In other words, before losing the coating (indicating Stomach-Yin deficiency), the tongue usually goes through a stage of losing the root of the coating (indicating Stomach-Qi deficiency).

Please do not assume that a coating without root is necessarily thin as it may be thin or thick: if it is thin, it simply indicates Stomach-Qi deficiency (therefore an Empty condition), but if it is thick, it indicates that, in addition to Stomach-Qi deficiency, there is also a pathogenic factor (therefore a Full/Empty condition).

We can therefore plot different stages in the pathological process that leads to full-blown Stomach-Yin deficiency with Empty Heat and the tongue is a very reliable and objective marker to identify these stages. Before describing these stages, it is important to clarify that, although Empty Heat eventually develops from Yin deficiency, there will be a long stage during which there is Yin deficiency without Empty Heat. On the tongue, the Yin deficiency is manifested by the lack of coating and the Empty Heat by the redness of the tongue body (associated with lack of coating). The stages leading to full-blown

Stomach-Yin deficiency with Empty Heat are as follows:

- Stomach-Qi good: tongue has coating with root
- Stomach-Qi weakened: coating without root (thin)
- Stomach-Yin deficiency: no coating (normal colour)
- Stomach-Yin deficiency with Empty Heat: no coating, red tongue body.

We have stated above that the tongue coating is a by-product of the Stomach's digestion: however, the Spleen also plays a role in forming the coating and therefore, often a lack of coating indicates both Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency.



Fig. 3. Stomach crack

Cracks are also indicative of Yin deficiency. Stomach-Yin deficiency may manifest either with a central, wide crack in the middle of the tongue (Fig. 3), or with scattered cracks all over (Figs. 4-5).



Fig. 4. Stomach cracks

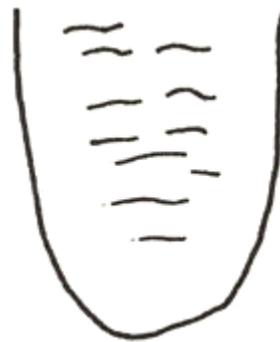


Fig. 5. Stomach cracks

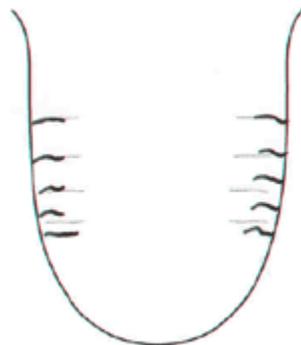


Fig. . 6. Spleen cracks

Spleen-Yin deficiency may manifest with small, transversal cracks on the sides: these are a very reliable sign of Spleen-Yin deficiency (Fig. 6).

We can now relate tongue images to the relevant remedies. I shall list the remedies in order of progression from Stomach- and Spleen-Qi deficiency to Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency.

Prosperous Earth

Patterns: Stomach- and Spleen-Qi deficiency
Tongue: Pale, coating with root.

Central Mansion

Patterns: Stomach and Spleen-Qi deficiency, Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency (borderline between the two).
Tongue: coating without root or partially peeled, body colour not Red, possibly central Stomach crack (Fig. 3) or scattered Stomach cracks (Figs. 4-5).

Harmonize the Centre

Patterns: Stomach- and Spleen-Qi deficiency, Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency (the latter more pronounced than in previous remedy), some Empty Heat, Phlegm.
Tongue: coating without root, partially peeled, body colour may tend to Red, possibly central Stomach crack (Fig. 3) or scattered Stomach cracks (Fig. 4-5) and/or Spleen cracks (Fig. 6).

Jade Spring

Patterns: Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency, Lung-Yin deficiency.
Tongue: without coating, Stomach cracks (Figs. 4-5), Spleen cracks (Fig. 6).
Besides these remedies for Empty conditions, we should mention also Soothe the Centre which is for Full/Empty conditions.

Soothe the Centre

Patterns: Spleen-Qi deficiency, Dampness and Qi stagnation in the Middle Burner.
Tongue: slightly Swollen, sticky coating.

FOCUS ON A REMEDY: PROSPEROUS EARTH

Prosperous Earth is a variation of Liu Jun Zi Tang Six Gentlemen Decoction from the "Revised Fine Formulae for Women" (Jiao Zhu Fu Ren Liang Fang). In turn, this formula is a variation of the famous Si Jun Zi Tang Four Gentlemen Decoction from the "Imperial Grace Formulary of the Tai Ping Era" (Tai Ping Hui Min He Ji Ju Fang) of 1078.

The ingredients of Prosperous Earth are:

Ren Shen Radix Ginseng
Bai Zhu Rhizoma Atractylodis macrocephalae
Fu Ling Poria
Chen Pi Pericarpium Citri reticulatae
Ban Xia Rhizoma Pinelliae
Zhi Gan Cao Radix Glycyrrhizae praeparata
Huang Qi Radix Astragali
Shan Yao Rhizoma Dioscoreae

The first six ingredients form the original formula Liu Jun Zi Tang. Ren Shen and Bai Zhu tonify

Stomach- and Spleen-Qi; Fu Ling and Chen Pi resolve Dampness from the Middle Burner; Ban Xia resolves Phlegm; Zhi Gan Cao tonifies the Middle Burner and harmonizes.

I have added Huang Qi and Shan Yao to strengthen the tonic effect and also to strengthen Lung-Qi.

Patterns: Stomach- and Spleen-Qi deficiency, some Dampness in the Middle Burner.

Indications: Poor appetite, slight abdominal distension after eating, tiredness, lassitude, pale complexion, weakness of the limbs, loose stools, slight depression, tendency to obesity, uncomfortable feeling in the epigastrium, lack of taste sensation, weak limbs, Pale tongue, Empty pulse.

Comments

Prosperous Earth is the main remedy to tonify Spleen-Qi: although it resolves Dampness, the main emphasis is on tonification. However, it contains herbs that resolve Dampness because the simultaneous occurrence of Spleen-Qi deficiency and some Dampness is extremely common. If Dampness predominates, the tongue has a thick-sticky coating and the pulse is Full and Slippery, then Drain Fields should be used instead. It is not advisable to use tonic herbs in the presence of a Full condition of Dampness.