

## TONICS

"The three months of Autumn are the time of harvest. The energy of Heaven begins to blow swiftly and the energy of Earth begins to change colour. One should go to bed early and rise early: maintain a peaceful mind in order to mitigate the decaying effects of Autumn; and restrain one's desires outwardly in order to preserve the energy of the Lungs. The Qi of Autumn controls nourishing and receiving. If one does not follow these rules in the Autumn, one will fall ill in Winter."

Autumn is here: a time of decrease and withdrawal. Few people in developed societies today change their behaviour or routine when the seasons change: most of us continue working the long hours and getting the same amount of sleep that we do in spring and summer at this time of the year. But the wise Chinese knew that autumn is a time when we should begin to conserve our Qi and Yang energy in order to get us through the coming winter months.

When we do not live according to the seasons, tiredness, fatigue, weakness and exhaustion may result, especially at this time of the year. As acupuncturists and herbalists, we may therefore find ourselves prescribing more tonic herbal remedies.

### TO TONIFY OR TO EXPEL: THAT IS THE QUESTION

Since the beginning of the history of Chinese herbal medicine, there has been an ongoing debate between different schools of thought as to whether one should tonify or expel. Lui Wan Su (1110-1200), a chief exponent of the School of Cooling, emphasized the necessity of clearing Heat and Fire. Zhu Dan Xi (1281-1358) said that nourishing Yin is the most crucial treatment principle because Yin is depleted by overwork. The School of Eliminating Pathogenic Factors, led by Chang Cong Cheng (1156-1228) advocated vomiting, sweating, purgation and even inducing salivation, sneezing and lachrymation as a way of expelling pathogenic factors, in his view the cause of most pathologies. Li Dong Yuan, the author of the celebrated "Discussion on Stomach and Spleen" (Pi Wei Lun) said that most diseases are caused by a deficiency of Stomach and Spleen induced by overwork and irregular diet and therefore advocated tonifying the Stomach and Spleen as the most important treatment method.

Therefore, it is important to be aware that there is no "set answer" as to when to tonify and when to expel and that one must examine each individual case and come to a decision based on the symptoms and signs of that patient using our own knowledge and judgement.

### EMPTY CONDITIONS

Tonics are obviously applicable when a patient suffers from a predominantly Empty condition, manifesting with a deficiency of either Qi, Blood, Yin or Yang, or a combination of any of these. It is important always to bear in mind that we must diagnose whether a condition is Full or Empty mainly from taking the pulse and observing the tongue. For example, a 50-year-old man may complain of tiredness, depression and exhaustion but, on taking his pulse, we find it is Full and Wiry. Therefore we can deduce that his symptoms derive from a Full rather than an Empty condition and it would not be applicable to tonify either with acupuncture or herbs.

### CAUSES OF DISEASE IN EMPTY CONDITIONS

As mentioned above, some schools of thought believe that, theoretically, we should never need to prescribe herbal tonics if we ate a proper diet and balanced work and rest in a good

way. So this implies that, even eight or nine hundred years ago, humans had a tendency to work too hard, not rest and not eat a good diet, rather than this being a purely 21st century phenomenon! Today, of course, few people live in a way which is health-enhancing and therefore it is often necessary to tonify with herbal medicine. The following are the most commonly seen factors which deplete a patient's energy

1. **Poor diet:** our post-natal Qi is mostly affected by what we eat. Eating on the go and eating the wrong foods weaken our Qi. A striving to be "fashionably thin", causing patient's to eat too little or follow fad diets generally leads to a deficiency of Qi and Blood. Patients who have been vegetarian for a long time and have not included good quality protein in their diet often present with severe Blood or Yin deficiency.
2. **Overwork:** working long hours and always being on the go depletes our Yin energy. This view was proposed by Zhu Dan Xi (a chief exponent of the School of Yin-Nourishing) in the 14th century and still very much applies to our society today. Many patients leave home at 6am and return at 10pm and expect not to be physically effected by this. Excessive mental work depletes Spleen-Qi and eventually Spleen-Blood. This is commonly seen in practice in students who are studying long hours or those in professions where a lot of mental work is needed.
3. **Emotions:** over-thinking and worry deplete Spleen-Qi and Blood. Fear depletes Kidney-Yin and/or -Yang. Grief and sadness deplete Lung-Qi. All these emotions, as well as many others, are widespread in today's society.
4. **Excessive sexual activity:** injures the Kidneys, especially Kidney-Yin (more in men than in women).
5. **Miscellaneous:** there are many other "habits" of the Western world today which are severely depleting. For example, women who work hard throughout their pregnancy and go back to work soon after the baby is born will often develop Kidney deficiency and Blood deficiency; excessive exercise, done in the name of "keeping fit" (especially running) consumes our Yang energy.

#### THE TONGUE AND PULSE IN EMPTY CONDITIONS

Obviously the state of the tongue and pulse will depend on which vital substance is lacking. The table below summarizes how they may appear:

	Tongue Body	Tongue Coating	Pulse
Qi deficiency	Normal colour or slightly pale	Normal	Weak
Blood deficiency	Pale colour and may be slightly thin	Normal	Choppy or Fine
Yin deficiency	Normal colour or Red if there is Empty Heat Cracks	Too thin or missing	Fine or Floating-Empty
Yang deficiency	Pale colour. May be wet and swollen if combined with Dampness	Normal	Normal

These are, however, general guidelines and it should be remembered that, in practice, the clinical picture is usually more complicated than this.

## TONIFYING WITH HERBS AND WITH ACUPUNCTURE

When prescribing herbs, it is absolutely paramount to be accurate in one's diagnosis (although it goes without saying that whatever treatment methods we are using the more accurate the diagnosis, the more effective the treatment will be). For example, you see a patient who has some Spleen-Qi deficiency and also Dampness. If treating just with acupuncture, it would be possible to do Tonic prescriptions should be prescribed only if we are absolutely sure that the condition is predominantly an Empty one, otherwise they may "stir up" the pathogenic factor and cause the patient's symptoms to be worse. Any underlying deficiency will obviously need to be addressed, but this may be done either with acupuncture or by prescribing two herbal remedies at the same time, i.e. a tonic and a remedy to clear the pathogenic factor.

In my experience, if we are not absolutely sure whether to prescribe a remedy which primarily tonifies or expels a pathogenic factor, it is safer to prescribe the former and tonify with acupuncture. I have seen patients' conditions get worse when they are given a tonic too soon but I have never seen a patient deteriorate when given a remedy that clears a pathogenic factor.

### YANG TONICS

#### Strengthen the Root

**Pattern:** Kidney-Yang deficiency, Fire of the Gate of Vitality declining, slight Blood deficiency

**Action:** Tonify and warm Kidney-Yang, stoke up the Fire of the Gate of Vitality, fill the Essence, nourish Blood, strengthen the Will-Power

**Indications:** Chilliness, cold feet, cold limbs, lower backache, weak knees, dizziness, tinnitus, depression, exhaustion, impotence, lack of libido, loose stools, pale urination, oedema, lack of drive

**Tongue:** Pale, Wet

**Pulse:** Deep-Weak

#### Unicorn Pearl

**Pattern:** Kidney-Yang deficiency, Essence deficiency

**Action:** Tonify and warm Kidney-Yang, nourish the Essence, strengthen the Governing, Directing and Penetrating vessels

**Indications:** Infertility, backache, dizziness, tinnitus, feeling cold, a history of amenorrhoea, or scanty periods, irregular periods, frequent pale urination, tiredness, depression, a history of miscarriages, pale complexion.

**Tongue:** Pale, wet

**Pulse:** Deep, weak

Strengthen the Root is a general Kidney-Yang tonic which may be used for men or women. Unicorn Pearl is also Kidney-Yang tonic but is specifically for women with gynaecological problems deriving from Yang deficiency.

### YIN TONICS

#### Nourish the Root

**Pattern:** Kidney-Yin deficiency

**Action:** Nourish Kidney-Yin and Essence, strengthen the will-power

**Indications:** Dizziness, tinnitus, sore back and legs, night-sweating, dry mouth and throat in the evening, feeling of heat, 5-palm heat, thirst, lower backache, depression, scanty-dark urine, dry skin and hair, dry stools.

**Tongue:** Red with rootless coating or no coating

**Pulse:** Floating-Empty or Weak on both rear positions.

Central Mansion and Prosperous Earth are similar remedies; however, Central Mansion is applicable when the patient has Qi deficiency with some Dampness but also tends towards Yin deficiency. Prosperous Earth, on the other hand, treats solely Qi deficiency.

## BLOOD TONICS

### Precious Sea

**Pattern:** Qi and Blood deficiency, Kidney deficiency

**Action:** Tonify Qi, nourish Blood, tonify the Kidneys

**Indications:** Tiredness, debility, weariness, depression, loose stools, poor appetite, blurred vision, tingling of limbs, insomnia, poor memory, dizziness, scanty periods or heavy periods, amenorrhoea, irregular periods, pale complexion, palpitations, backache, low libido, infertility.

### Calm the Spirit

**Pattern:** Spleen-Qi and Spleen-Blood deficiency, Heart-Qi and Heart-Blood deficiency

**Action:** Tonify Spleen-Qi and Spleen-Blood, tonify Heart-Qi and Heart-Blood, calm the Mind, open the Mind's orifices, stimulate the Spleen's holding of Blood.

**Indications:** Palpitations, insomnia, anxiety, poor memory, depression, dull-pale face which may also have a slight malar flush, a slight feeling of heat in the evening, poor appetite, loose stools, tiredness, weariness, constipation, despondency, weak limbs, scanty periods or very heavy periods.

**Tongue:** Pale, thin or swollen, depending on whether Blood or Qi deficiency predominates.

**Pulse:** Weak, choppy

### Brighten the Eyes

**Pattern:** Deficient Liver-Blood and Kidneys not nourishing the eyes

**Action:** Nourish Liver-Blood and the Kidneys, brighten the eyes

**Indications:** Dull headaches around the eyes and eyebrows, blurred vision, floaters, gritty eyes, tired eyes, dry eyes, dizziness, tiredness, dull-pale complexion, scanty periods, depression, insomnia, tingling limbs, poor memory, dry hair.

**Tongue:** Pale, especially on the sides, thin

**Pulse:** Choppy or fine.

### Growing Jade

**Pattern:** Kidney-Yin and Essence deficiency

**Action:** Nourish Kidney-Yin, nourish the Essence, strengthen the Directing and Penetrating vessels.

**Indications:** Infertility, a history of amenorrhoea or miscarriages, scanty periods, irregular periods, dizziness, tinnitus, a dry throat, a feeling of heat in the evening, backache, depression, slight anxiety, dry stools, dry hair, scanty-dark urine, night-sweating, malar flush.

**Tongue:** Red without coating

**Pulse:** Floating-Empty

### Jade Spring

**Pattern:** Stomach-Yin deficiency, Spleen-Yin deficiency, Lung-Yin deficiency, Stomach-

Empty Heat

**Action:** Nourish Stomach-, Spleen- and Lung-Yin, clear Stomach Empty Heat

**Indications:** Excessive hunger, dry mouth, desire to drink in small sips, dry lips, tiredness, mental restlessness, poor digestion, slight burning epigastric pain, mouth ulcers, dry stools.

Nourish the Root is a general Kidney-Yin tonic which may be used for men or women.

Growing Jade is a Kidney-Yin tonic which is specifically for women=s gynaecological problems.

Jade Spring is a Yin tonic, but for the Stomach, Spleen and Lungs rather than the Kidneys.

## QI TONICS

Prosperous Earth

**Pattern:** Spleen-Qi and Lung-Qi deficiency, Dampness

**Action:** tonify Spleen-Qi and Lung-Qi, resolve Dampness

**Indications:** poor digestion, tiredness, slight abdominal distension and fullness, poor appetite, craving for sweets, loose stools, desire to lie down, weak voice, propensity to catching colds, mild depression

**Tongue:** Pale

**Pulse:** Weak or Empty

Central Mansion

**Pattern:** Spleen- and Stomach-Qi deficiency, Stomach- and Spleen-Yin deficiency, Dampness in the Middle Burner, Lung-Qi deficiency

**Action:** Tonify Stomach- and Spleen-Qi, nourish Stomach- and Spleen-Yin, resolve Dampness, stop diarrhoea, tonify Lung-Qi.

**Indications:** Loose stools, diarrhoea, poor appetite, poor digestion, a slight feeling of fullness and heaviness of the epigastrium, nausea, weakness of the limbs, epigastric pain, tiredness, late onset diabetes.

**Tongue:** Pale, slightly Swollen, sticky but thin coating which may be rootless, Stomach crack or cracks.

**Pulse:** Weak in general, slightly slippery

Brocade Sinews

**Pattern:** Chronic Wind-Damp Painful Obstruction (Bi) Syndrome with Liver-Blood and/or Liver-Yin deficiency

**Action:** Nourish Liver-Blood and Liver-Yin, benefit sinews, expel Wind-Dampness from the joints.

**Indications:** chronic soreness and slight swelling of the joints, dizziness, numbness or tingling of limbs, poor memory, insomnia, dry skin and hair, dry eyes, blurred vision.

**Tongue:** Pale and thin or Red and thin without coating

**Pulse:** Choppy or fine, possibly only on the left side.

Precious Sea is specifically for any gynaecological problem that derives from Blood deficiency.

Calm the Spirit addresses a Blood deficiency that arises from the Spleen and manifests predominantly on an emotional level.

Brighten the Eyes is for Blood deficiency which manifests with symptoms in the head, and specifically in the eyes.

Brocade Sinews is for Bi syndrome with an underlying Blood or Yin deficiency.

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