



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

## Transportation & Distribution: Your Guide to the Spleen

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The Spleen, with its paired Official, the Stomach, represents the Earth Element within us. Earth, in the cycle of the five seasons, is associated with the late summer — harvest time.

While each season has its unique and irreplaceable purpose, the promise of a harvest is the culmination of all. What had once been a seed, has come to fruition.

The Earth generously provides the nourishment we need to live and thrive. The Officials of Earth within us receive the drink and food we consume, make it into a proper digestive mixture, and transport its essence to fuel every organ, function, and system.

Professor J.R. Worsley likened the Stomach Official to a bakery. It receives the various ingredients and, if blended and baked properly, will make a delicious cake.

The Spleen is likened to a fleet of trucks, working twenty-four-seven, that transport the cakes to the consumers. Within us, the Spleen Official transports and distributes the proper amount of nourishment to every cell and every level — physical and non-physical.

We can well imagine what would happen if the truck driver failed to show up for work or got lost making deliveries. Regardless of the quality and quantity of the food itself, if the transporter failed to deliver, some people would still starve, while others might be stuffed with far more than they need.

### The Physical Level

The Spleen is an organ in the upper left part of the abdomen, to the left of the Stomach. It is fist-shaped and about four inches long. It acts as a blood filter and is the largest lymphatic organ of the body.



Old red blood cells are recycled in the Spleen. Platelets and white blood cells are stored there. The white cells — lymphocytes — defend against invading bacteria and viruses by producing antibodies to kill foreign microorganisms and stop infection.

The Spleen is not vital to survival and it is possible to live without the physical organ, although its energetic meridian and functions remain, even if the organ is removed. Without the Spleen, other organs in the body can adapt and increase their ability to fight infection and remove old red blood cells.

The Spleen is called the Official of Transportation and Distribution. Everything that moves in the body does so by the grace of this Official. Any organ, function, or system will suffer if it is deprived of nourishment.

#### A Matter of Health

A healthy Spleen keeps the blood properly circulating in the vessels. It rules the muscles by transporting blood and energy to the flesh and limbs. It lifts the Ch'i, keeping our organs in place, preventing prolapse, holding and supporting everything in its proper position. It grants us a healthy sense of taste, allowing us to savor all five tastes.

If the Spleen is imbalanced, there may be cold hands and feet, as energy is not sufficiently distributed to the extremities. As the muscles are not receiving the essence of food, there may be weakness and fatigue.

Problems with movement of fluids and other substances can result in thickening, coagulation, and stagnation, as the flow becomes impaired. Mucous accumulates; there may be swelling, fibroid tumors, stones, constipation, a feeling of heaviness, even paralysis.

Some parts of the body may be edematous while other parts may be withered and emaciated. As

the movement of blood is impaired, there may be varicose veins, hemorrhoids, masses, and menstrual problems such as amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea, and menorrhagia.

In Chinese medicine, the function of the Spleen also includes the Pancreas and is often named the Spleen/Pancreas Official. The Pancreas is a pear-shaped gland, located behind the Stomach in the upper left abdomen. A healthy Pancreas produces the chemicals, in just the right amounts to digest the foods we eat. It has two basic functions: one exocrine and the other endocrine.

The exocrine tissue produces pancreatic enzymes, released when food enters the stomach and into the duodenum, to aid digestion of fats, carbohydrates and proteins. The remaining tissue consists of endocrine cells called Islets of Langerhans. These cells produce the hormones insulin and glucagon that are transported throughout the bloodstream to maintain the right balance of blood sugar.

### The Mental Level

Just as we need proper fluidity, transport, and delivery at the physical level, the mind also needs to be fluid and agile — able to receive experience, hold and contain it in the storehouse of memory, retrieve it as needed, and easily transmit thoughts outwardly.

The proper dispatching of nourishment to every corner of the mind gives a sense of mental peace and safety, with the security of having access to our harvest of experience. With a Spleen/Pancreas imbalance, the mind can become unable to focus, concentrate, remember, or study, as thoughts cannot be held in their proper place.

The mind may simply race uncontrollably from one random thought to another. Contrarily, it can become stuck and immobile, rigid and stubborn. Obsessional thinking, incessant worry, frustration, anxiety, and depression are expressions of stagnancy just as surely as phlegm in the physical body.

The colloquial expression "venting the spleen" means giving expression (movement) to pent up anger. There are few causes of anxiety and frustration greater than being unable to remember, feeling lost and confused. It is as if the storehouse of memory is unavailable. Like the food and drink we consume, experience is virtually useless if we cannot digest it, glean its wisdom, and put it to use.

### The Spirit Level

When we speak of treating the spirit, we must remember that the spirit itself— pure consciousness — is indivisible and cannot be compromised or corrupted. Composed of nothing but itself, it has no parts to treat — to balance or imbalance. However, our perception of spirit can indeed be compromised.

Like dark clouds obscuring a clear blue sky beyond, our perception of the blue sky is compromised. Thus, we speak of treating the spirit level, not the spirit itself. In spiritual health, we can feel at home anywhere, as we can digest all experience.

With gratitude, we can perceive the abundance that is ever-present. These are spiritual gifts of the Earth Element. Both pleasant and unpleasant experiences contribute to our storehouse of wisdom. The Earth Element is connected to the archetypical figure of the mother, our first source of nourishment.

The love of the mother instills in us the ability to care for or "mother" ourselves, and ultimately care for others. If we perceived, as children, that our mother (or mother figure) was unloving,

uncaring, unable or unwilling to feed and nurture us, we may go through life seeking to fill the void, searching for the absent mother.

Our internal refrain becomes one of, "Feed me; nourish me; understand me." This is essentially a cry for sympathy, the emotion associated with the Earth Element, and is a key diagnostic indicator of a primary imbalance in the Earth.

The Earth imbalanced person may require sympathy from others excessively, or may tend to smother others with the emotion — over-mothering, endeavoring to "fix" everyone else, ignoring his/her own needs, and becoming an exhausted martyr.

In some cases, the person may be so distrustful of the motives of others that he or she may reject sympathy entirely. As relates to the Spleen specifically, the patient may be stuck in self pity, may lack the ability and motivation to move toward goals, may feel ungrounded, uncentered, uncomfortable in his own skin, disjointed, isolated, unsatisfied, jealous that others are being cared about, but not him.

While all human beings want to be understood and sympathized with, or proffer sympathy, in a given set of circumstances, Earth imbalanced patients want it, or want to give it, beyond what is appropriate.

The voice takes on a sound we call "singing". It is natural and appropriate to make this sound when offering comfort and caring, like soothing a little child to sleep, or soothing its tears when in distress.

It is a sound we welcome when we are sick or hurting and need to know that someone cares. The Earth imbalanced patient will tend to make this sound virtually all the time — regardless of whether the circumstances are appropriate for sympathy or not.

These two diagnostic indicators: emotion and sound, combined with a yellow skin color (most easily observed lateral to the eyes), and a fragrant odor will confirm Earth as the primary elemental imbalance (AKA Causative Factor).

In Classical Five-Element Acupuncture, the thrust of our treatment is to support, balance, and harmonize the Causative Factor Element, which is the origin of imbalance that ultimately spreads throughout the system.

## The Points

Each of the 21 points on the Spleen meridian serves to help this Official achieve health and harmony in performing its vital functions. Each has a name, translated from the Chinese characters, which suggests the unique gifts it can bring to the patient in need. The following are examples.

### Spleen 8 — Earth Motivator

This point is used to break up hard, inert, and unresponsive Earth. The Earth is like concrete - dried, stuck, tired, and weak - lacking the motivation to move. Spleen 8 is akin to bulldozing the earth before planting - breaking it up into small pieces that can receive warmth, water, and into which seeds can penetrate, sprout and extend roots.

When the transporter gets stuck - this point gets it started. The Earth imbalanced patient in need of this point may be physically inert, exhausted, lazy, and unmotivated, but may as well be mentally

stuck, stubborn, obstinate, and immovable.

Spiritually, he/she may lack a sense of contentment and being at home, or may feel imprisoned, without motivation or possibility of forward movement.

### Spleen 21 — Great Enveloping

This point is a grand leveler that promotes flow and ensures that every organ and function – down to the cellular level receives a fair and appropriate share of nourishment. It is known as the Master Junction (AKA Luo Connecting) Point, as it can energetically balance paired Officials within any of the elements so that they share the available energy equally.

At the mental and spiritual levels, Earth imbalanced patients needing this point may have lost touch with the great enveloping embrace of Mother Nature that is ever-present.

It opens the realization that the bounty of heaven is spread out upon the Earth. It is just that the imbalanced patient does not perceive it. This point opens perception, allowing a person to savor the harvest within and without.

### The Questions

The following questions are useful for self-observation and can be appropriately modified to inquire as to the state of a patient's Spleen/Pancreas Official.

While any symptom can come from a primary imbalance in any element, as imbalance spreads from one Element to the next, if you suspect a problem in a patient's Earth element and specifically with the Spleen/Pancreas Official, here are some questions to consider in assessing its state:

1. When have you been unable to commit something to memory?
2. When have you gone blank during a test, a presentation, or performance?
3. When have you felt stuffed after eating?
4. When have you been obsessed with worry?
5. When have you felt too weak to do anything?
6. When have you felt that no one cared about you?
7. How did your mother (or mother figure) take care of you?
8. When have you eaten sweets as a self-medication for stress?
9. What experiences could you simply not digest?
10. When have you felt gratitude for what you learned from an unpleasant experience?

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