



HERBAL MEDICINE

Spring Allergies & The Spleen: Looking at Pattern Differentiation

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As the season of Spring fades away and we shift into the warm summer months, many patients suffer from chronic allergies. This is by far one of the most common issues I see in the clinic as well as often mistreated and misdiagnosed. It is not uncommon for practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine to blindly administer "anti-histamine" herbal medicine from a TCM dispensary or a supplement based naturopathic approach.

Pattern Differentiation

While this generic approach may help some patients, the majority of my patients suffering from chronic allergies present complex TCM pattern presentations. Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine must not blindly ignore the pattern differentiation and simply hand out patent medicines for "sinus issues" while ignoring the examination of tongue, pulse, and other presenting symptoms which form the unique pattern presentation of each patient.

Perhaps the most common presentation I see ignored in cases of chronic allergies which appear in the spring and continue into the summer season is Spleen Qi Vacuity. Time after time I see patients in my office who appear with bottles of generic "allergy" TCM patent medicines which do not fit the patient's tongue, pulse, and / or underlying symptom presentations.

Yes, the patient may present with a runny nose or sinus congestion, yet a generic TCM allergy patent medicine or a generic herbal / vitamin supplement does not address issues such as: a pale swollen tongue with teeth-marks, a red swollen tongue with teeth-marks and a sticky coat, a slippery or wiry pulse and chronic sluggish digestion. Practitioners must address any signs of underlying Spleen Qi Vacuity and any concomitant complicating issues of Damp-Heat which commonly occurs with chronic Spleen issues.



If these foundational underlying issues are ignored, allergies will continue to cause issues and even more complications can ensue. The goal of Traditional Chinese Medicine is to treat the root and the branches, not simply but band-aids on the branches.

Therefore, clinicians should look closely for underlying Spleen issues in chronic allergy issues and administer the appropriate TCM patents / formulas. One of the most important complicating side-effects of the chronic use of antihistamines, allopathic and herbal alike, is dryness. Patients suffering from chronic allergies commonly take antihistamines daily.

Issues With the Spleen

This chronic long-term use of antihistamines, whether herbal or allopathic, dry up mucus membranes throughout the body. This often results in Blood Vacuity from a TCM perspective. If there is an underlying Spleen Qi Vacuity, a concomitant Blood Vacuity will be a predictable outcome. This is one of the fundamental reasons why ignoring an underlying Spleen Qi issue while administering generic antihistamine formulas can cause so many long-term complications.

Besides issues of drying resulting in or complicating TCM Blood Vacuity patterns, long-term use of antihistamines also does not address underlying complications of patterns of TCM Heat patterns. Such patterns as Depressive Heat, Damp Heat, and Vacuity Heat commonly appear along with underlying Spleen Qi Vacuity. Generic antihistamine formulas do not address complicated TCM Heat issues, and if combined with an underlying Spleen Vacuity / Blood Vacuity, then symptoms will only worsen on a deeper root-level.

Considerations to Make

It is extremely important for TCM practitioners and clinicians to consider these important details when encountering presentations of "spring allergies" or "summer colds" / "summer allergies." Such presentations often are the fruit of seeds of imbalance which were planted in the winter

season when diets were heavy on fatty foods and sugar-laden foods. Diets heavy on protein, fat or sugar, so common in the cold holiday winter season, can be extremely taxing on the Spleen Qi. I have written a past [article](#) on the importance of the Spleen in a high-protein diet.

This issue is extremely important to consider when patients present with spring allergies which are chronic or spring allergies which continue into the summer season. I hope this short article encourages clinicians to look deeper in cases of supposed simple allergies. Although this installment is short, the message is long overdue in the world of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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