



CHRONIC / ACUTE CONDITIONS

Strep Throat Can Be More Than a Sore Throat: Herbs for Guttate Psoriasis

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Strep can present with an itchy, unrelenting rash: *guttate psoriasis*.
- Treatment for guttate psoriasis must involve the restoration of immune balance, calming the immune response from attacking healthy tissue.
- Traditional Chinese medicine addresses the internal immune imbalance in the body and the need to assist in establishing a return to homeostasis to mitigate the symptoms.

It's that time again, when sniffles, coughs and sneezes abound, plaguing our children and of course, parents, teachers and caregivers, too. As we enter the cold and flu season, parents should consider herbal medicine, not only in the anticipatory stocking of the family medicine cabinet, but also in finding a practitioner licensed with their state's board of medicine who can recommend specific herbal remedies for symptoms and diagnosis when ailments present.

From the kitchen table to the medicine cabinet, household remedies are common. We all grew up with at-home remedies such as saltwater gargles, honey ginger tea, and eucalyptus rubs. These timeless solutions came from family tradition, passed down from one generation to the next.

Expanding on this know-how, licensed herbalists are experts poised to improve conditions or resolve our modern minor illnesses, with an ability to dispense any of over 180 herbal formulas and 365+ traditional herbs. Single herbs and those combined into synergistic formulas can have antipyretic, antiviral, antispasmodic, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and antioxidant effects.

Not Just Strep

Strep throat is often a repeat offender among school-age children and when presented, there is a

need for an herbal composition containing these qualities.

Once contracted, most children complain of a scratchy, raw, sore throat, but in some cases, strep throat isn't as obvious. Strep can present with an itchy, unrelenting rash, diagnosed as *guttate psoriasis*.

This rash can take months to settle or clear. Guttate psoriasis involves the activation of T cells, white blood cells whose function is to defend the body from foreign invaders. T cells produce cytokines to manage the inflammatory response to a foreign invasion. Dysregulated T cells mistakenly attack healthy skin cells, disrupting the natural balance of the anti- and pro-inflammatory feedback loop, leading to an intensely itchy rash with scaly, dry skin.

Western Medical Treatment

Western medical treatment depends on the severity of the condition, the extent of the rash, and individual factors. Here are some common treatment options for guttate psoriasis:

- *Topical Corticosteroids*: Topical steroids reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms.
- *Topical Calcineurin Inhibitors*: Topical inhibitors suppress the immune response and reduce inflammation.
- *Phototherapy*: Exposing the affected skin to controlled doses of ultraviolet (UV) light can help slow down rapid skin cell growth and improve symptoms.
- *Systemic Medications*: Oral or injectable medications suppress pro-inflammatory cytokines and anti-inflammatory cytokines. Balance between these two factors is crucial since anti-inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-10 and transforming growth factor-beta help modulate the immune response and inhibit the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines.
- *Moisturizers*: Moisturizers can help soothe the skin, reduce dryness, and alleviate itching by acting as the mortar the skin needs to maintain its seal.
- *Managing Triggers*: Identifying and managing triggers, such as streptococcal infections, stress, or certain medications, can help prevent flare-ups.

The TCM Perspective

Parents may be reluctant to give their children immune-suppressing drugs such as steroids. Many herbal combinations are available to quell the residual side effects from a strep infection while boosting the immune system's balance to resolve the rash.

Treatment approaches for guttate psoriasis must involve the restoration of immune balance, calming the immune response from attacking healthy tissue. Traditional Chinese medicine addresses the internal immune imbalance in the body and the need to assist in establishing a return to homeostasis to mitigate the symptoms.

In TCM, guttate psoriasis is seen as a manifestation of an underlying imbalance in the body. TCM views the condition as a combination of external and internal factors, such as heat, wind, dampness, blood stagnation, and toxic heat. Treatment in TCM aims to address these underlying imbalances and promote overall well-being.

Herbal remedies may be prescribed to clear heat and toxins, resolve blood stagnation, and strengthen *qi* and blood. Acupuncture, cupping, and other modalities may also be utilized to promote the flow of energy and blood throughout the body.

The main principles involved in understanding guttate psoriasis from a TCM perspective include assessing the following underlying conditions:

- *Heat and Toxins*: Guttate psoriasis may be the result of excess heat and toxins in the body. These pathogenic factors can accumulate and disrupt the flow of *qi* and blood, leading to skin manifestations.
- *Blood Stagnation*: Impaired blood circulation can lead to accumulations and stagnations, blocking proper substance flow and resulting in characteristic skin lesions.
- *Wind and Dampness*: External factors such as wind and dampness have influence over the development of guttate psoriasis.
- *Deficiency of Qi and Blood*: Underlying deficiencies in *qi* and blood weaken the body's ability to fight off pathogenic factors. A weakened immune system and imbalances in the body's energy can make an individual more susceptible to guttate psoriasis.

TCM Herbal Treatment

Patients with guttate psoriasis suffer from intense itching and dehydrated, peeling skin. The first task in treatment involves lowering the level of itch to make the patient feel more comfortable. It is important to prescribe a combination of herbs that not only expels wind, but also assists in re-establishing the balance within the patient's immune system.

Combining (creating a soak) of *bai ji li* (*Tribulus*), *ku shen* (*Sophorae flavescens radix*), *bai xian pi* (dictamnus root bark), *jing jie* (*Schizonepeta*), *fang feng* (*Saposhnikovia*), *di fu zi* (*Kochia*), and *she chuang zi* (cnidium seed) as a wash is a great way to topically resolve the itch.

An internal remedy should include a combination of heat-clearing, balance-modulating, and anti-inflammatory herbs not only targeting the direct symptoms, but also addressing the root of this condition: an immune system that is out of balance. The following herbs are known to have a positive effect on resolving guttate psoriasis:

Ban lan gen (*Radix isatidis*) has powerful anti-bacterial properties. It clears heat while detoxifying the body. *Ban lan gen* has been shown in studies to be effective against *Streptococcus pyogenes*, the bacterium associated with strep throat, and other various respiratory infections. This herb has anti-inflammatory and immune-modulating properties as per several research studies.

Huang bai (*Cortex phellodendri*) is also known for its anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties, but is useful against the symptoms of guttate psoriasis in that it is very helpful in its ability to cool the skin.

Ku shen (*Radix sophorae flavescens*) possesses antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. It is believed to have a purging effect on heat and toxins in the body, potentially assisting in the management of guttate psoriasis.

A few other important herbs, *lian qiao* (*Fructus forsythiae*), *jin yin hua* (*Flos lonicerae*), and *xuan shen* (*Radix scrophulariae*), have been found to inhibit the production of inflammatory cytokines while modulating immune balance.

Traditional formulas, created thousands of years ago, addressed patterns of disharmony. In our current times, with Western medical technology, we find that these herbs have properties that address the very biomedical mechanisms involved in many of our modern diseases.

Resources

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