



Diana Hermann, LAc

When a patient has Heat in the Blood Stirs Up Wind, the episode appears abruptly and/or is progressive. But Blood Deficiency Leads to Wind and Dryness occurs during the stable phase of common psoriasis - the lesions are not growing in size and there are not many new lesions appearing. The skin is not bright red; rather the lesions are a paler red or even dull pink. They are drier and have white (or silvery) scales and may be itchy. Accompanying symptoms can include: pale complexion, lassitude/fatigue, insomnia, dry skin (not just the psoriasis lesions), dry hair, dry eyes and brittle nails.

In women, the period might have scanty flow or there might be amenorrhea. The patient's tongue will most likely be pale with a thin coat (or none at all) and it may be dry. The pulses will be thin or wiry. In this pattern, the treatment principal is to Nourish (Liver) Blood, Dispel Wind, and Moisten Dryness.

When there is *Qi* & Blood Stasis involved in psoriasis, the lesions typically are darker in color. The lesions can appear dull red, purple or even brown. From a little distance they may even look like a bruise (but unlike typical bruises, the border between the lesion and the healthy skin will be very clearly demarcated). They often have silvery-white scales and tend to be thicker than the lesions seen in the other patterns; some older lesions may resemble oyster shells. In this phase, the old lesions are usually fixed in size and not many new lesions are appearing. The degree of itching can vary from intensely itchy to not itchy at all. Women with *Qi* & Blood Stasis may have painful periods (often with clots) or heavy periods. The patient's tongue might be dull purple or dark red or there may even be purple spots. The patient's pulse is choppy or wiry/choppy, and deep (esp. if the stasis has existed for a very long time). In the case of *Qi* & Blood Stasis, the treatment principal is obviously to move *qi* and blood. If there is much itching, herbal treatment should also include herbs to Dispel Wind.

In women whose psoriasis seems to be related to their menstrual cycle, pregnancy or childbirth, there is probably Disharmony in the Ren and Chong Vessels. This pattern of disharmony is not exclusive to women, but it is much less common and less obvious to diagnose in men. In this pattern, the psoriasis lesions often appear before pregnancy but disappear during pregnancy only to reappear after giving birth. In some patients, the condition becomes aggravated before the period (or possibly immediately after). The lesions are typically bright or pale red, with silvery scales. They are widely distributed over the body. Itching is usually not as severe as in other patterns. Accompanying signs and symptoms can include PMS, painful or irregular periods, general malaise, or dizziness. The tongue can vary but usually will be red or purplish with a thin coating. You might also suspect this pattern in women who are perimenopausal or if there are fluctuations in hormone levels that seem to affect the psoriasis. This pattern can combine with other TCM patterns, too. The main treatment principal here is to regulate the *Chong* & *Ren Mai*. If there are additional TCM patterns present (such as Blood Deficiency or *Qi* & Blood Stagnation), be sure to address those as well.

In my clinical experience, I have found herbal treatment to be far superior to acupuncture in the treatment of psoriasis. When formulating herbal prescriptions, the main focus of your treatment should be based on the proper TCM differentiation. But in all cases of psoriasis, regardless of TCM pattern, I always include herbs that have been found to have anti-neoplastic properties.

Because of the over-proliferation of skin cells that is characteristic of psoriasis, it is helpful to add these herbs to your formula whether treatment is internal or external. Some of these herbs include: *Da Qing Ye*, *Qing Dai*, *Tu Fu Ling*, *Ku Shen*, *Zi Cao Gen*, and *Bai Hua She She Cao*. If there is much itching, be sure to add herbs that Dispel Wind such as *Fang Feng* (which Disperses Wind without being drying), *Jing Jie*, *Ju Hua*, *Chan Tui*, *Ku Shen*, *Bai Xian Pi*, or *Bai Ji Li* (use caution with *Bai Ji Li* topically because it may actually cause a rash). If there is significant scaling, add herbs that help moisten the skin (Moisten Blood & Yin): *Dang Gui*, *He Shou Wu*, *Bai Shao*, *Shu Di Huang*, *Tian Men Dong*, or *Mai Men Dong*. For most chronic skin diseases that involve Heat in the Blood, I will also add herbs to Clear Heat and Resolve Toxins, such as *Jin Yin Hua*, *Lian Qiao*, *Zi Hua Di Ding* or *Pu Gong Ying*.

Many patients who have had psoriasis for a long time know little about their disease or how to manage it. It is imperative that you educate your patients on the following points:

1. Avoid Prednisone use: Common psoriasis can transform into the erythrodermic type (potentially

life-threatening form) if triggered by certain factors. Use of internal (systemic) corticosteroids (such as Prednisone) has been identified as one possible trigger. Other possible triggers can include sunburn, strongly irritant topical medications, or allergic skin reactions to medications (including to drugs not used in the treatment of psoriasis). Certain medications can also trigger a form of psoriasis called guttate psoriasis.

2. Be cautious with topical cortisone cream: Sudden withdrawal of internal or topical steroids (including cortisone creams) can exacerbate common psoriasis or trigger it to transform into another life-threatening form of psoriasis known as Von Zumbusch (a pustular type of psoriasis). Other triggers of Von Zumbusch psoriasis may include pregnancy, blood pressure medications, iodides and Indomethacin (an NSAID).
3. Avoid getting the common cold or other infections. Psoriasis can get worse during and after infections. A form of psoriasis called guttate psoriasis can appear abruptly after respiratory infections or strep throat.
4. Avoid injury/trauma to skin. This includes sunburns as well as surgical scars, abrasions, cuts, and other wounds.
5. Avoid alcohol, spicy or greasy foods, sugary foods/sweets, and shellfish (esp. shrimp). Some sources say to avoid most fish but this is debatable since the omega-3 fatty acids contained in some fish are helpful.
6. Stop smoking.

References

1. Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology by John Chen and Tina Chen.

JULY 2011