The most common Digestive Symptoms and Disorders
Etiology, TCM understanding, diagnosis, medical treatment, herbal treatment

Part 1, Symptoms
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Most Common Symptoms and associated disorders

- Constipation; chronic, or of short duration; hard, dry stools
  - Etiology—Lack of fiber, too much sitting, insufficient fluid intake, genetic and epigenetic factors (these last 2 are relevant throughout!)
  - TCM etiology, dx—Invasion of dry pathogen or Spleen imbalance
    - Diagnostic—tongue dry, perhaps swollen, other signs of SP Qi deficiency
    - Lack of 1 complete bowel movement/day (2 or 3 after meals ideal for many, but not everyone)
  - Medical treatment—laxatives; soluble fiber (psyllium)
  - Herbal treatment
    - Stimulant laxatives—cascara, rhubarb, buckthorn bark, yellow dock (mild), senna (last resort, tends to cause cramping)
    - Qi regulators to help moderate possibility of cramping, diarrhea
    - Orange peel (also Qing pi) green citrus fruit (zhi shi-immature bitter orange, zhi ki—bitter orange peel, colder), cyperus
    - Soluble fiber supplements—prune powder, psyllium, flax, marshmallow root
    - Triphala (three myrobalans, taken without seed: Amalaki, Bibhitaki, and Haritaki)
    - Of course more soluble and insoluble fiber in the diet—beans, etc.

- Diarrhea; low-grade and chronic, or sudden onset with foul odor; sometimes with blood
  - Etiology—Ingestion of pathogenic organisms with food or water, use of antibiotics (sometimes unwittingly because it is in water and foods)
  - TCM etiology—accumulation of damp heat in lower “Jiao”; heat pathogen
  - TCM dx—tongue has yellow coating, especially towards back
  - Medical treatment—psyllium (thickeners), antispasmodics (Imodium), Probiotics
  - Notes: don’t forget dehydration, electrolyte intake with diarrhea
  - Herbal Treatments
- Antimicrobials for the gut—berberine-containing herbs or berberine sulfate tablets (100 mg, up to 3 x daily); garlic, freshly crushed or allicin-potential capsules (i.e. Garlicin); probiotics (100 billion CFU up to 200, morning and evening)
- Demulcents—marshmallow root, mallow leaves, plantain leaves (all as teas, up to 15 grams/day as infusions or decoctions)
- Antiinflammatories—chamomile, lemon balm, Prunella (ad lib)
- Laxatives to drain the damp heat pathogens (rhubarb root, cascara bark, yellow dock-mild)
- Astringents—blackberry root, oak twig bark, raspberry leaves, oak twig bark (9-12 grams/day in infusion or decoction), Prunella, fireweed herb (Epilobium grandiflorum; peppermint herb-simmer, let steep for 1-2 hours); diarrhea with pain—meadowsweet tops, willow bark (steep for 1-2 hours after simmer)

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- Reflux, typically after eating (acid reflux, burping, burning sensation, nausea); GERD (may be linked to *H. pylori*)
  - Etiology—Overeating; difficult to digest combinations for instance fried foods, fatty foods coating other foods, slowing down digestion; consistent intake of irritating foods like black pepper, overly-processed foods
  - TCM dx—Stomach Qi deficiency, rebellious Stomach Qi, Stomach yin deficiency, Spleen Q deficiency
  - TCM principle—rebellious, rising Qi; tx, descend the Qi; determine if the Liver is attacking Stomach
  - Medical treatment—drugs that reduce acid levels, such as the proton pump inhibitors Aciphex, Nexium, Pravacid, Prilosec, and Protonix and the H2 blockers Axid, Pepcid, Tagamet, and Zantac (extremely common treatments)
  - Herbal treatments
    - common herbs, pinellia (dissolves mucus, warms), licorice (spleen tonic), fuling (spleen tonic, removes dampness),
    - tangerine or orange peel, or cold, bitter herbs like gentian, skullcap
      - Bitter tonics are time-honored, used in many cultures (caution with gastritis, gastric ulcer)
- Descend the rebellious stomach, or spleen Qi—cardamom fruit, unripe bitter orange (zhi shi), Hou po (magnolia bark—regulates Qi, moves it downward)
- Liver Qi stagnation can cause the Qi to not descend (leading to reflux)—bupleurum, boldo, yellow dock

• Abdominal discomfort (uncomfortable feeling of fullness associated with eating)
  - Etiology—Overeating; difficult to digest combinations; emotional stress; worry, etc.; diverticulitis, bowel inflammation
  - TCM dx—food stagnation, SP Qi deficiency
  - TCM principle
    - remove food stagnation, tonify SP Qi, regulate Qi, remove dampness (if present)
    - Liver attacking spleen (wiry pulse, temple headache, irritability, anger, irregular menstruation
  - Medical treatment—pepto bismol (antacid, absorber), alka seltzer (antacid, aspirin)
  - Herbal treatment
    - Wormwood tea (2-3 times a day before meals)
    - Bitter tonics (containing gentian, orange peel, green citrus fruit, mountain gentian, bogbean
    - For cold conditions with damp—ginger, Asian ginseng, red ginseng with older people, chai (6-9 grams for each herb/day as a decoction)

• Pain anywhere in the abdomen
  - difficult to pinpoint problem
  - pain is often diffuse or moves around
  - carefully evaluate and ask questions about frequency, situation, intensity, duration
  - palpation of abdominal area—relief (stagnation) or does the pain worsen?
  - Refer to doctor if persistant for dx (cancer, diverticuli, inflammation or just gas?)
  - Epigastric (located in the center upper abdomen in the intercostal area) burning, pain in the stomach area
  - Sudden pain in the upper right abdomen with nausea, perhaps vomiting, fever (possible gallstone blockage). Other more chronic pain from gallbladder inflammation
  - Of course know the signs, symptoms of appendicitis, refer to emergency if you suspect
Diagnostic while waiting for medical evaluation, may offer some relief—simple herbs that could include chamomile or peppermint tea *ad lib*, or a digestive bitter product that contains gentian (or gentian family herb) plus Qi regulators like orange peel, green citrus fruit, ginger, cinnamon, other herbs; plantain leaf as demulcent, antiinflammatory

- Pain due to gas—massage belly clockwise, do down dog on knees allow gas to come out; herbal carminatives
  - Peppermint tea, oil (1-2 drops in a cup of chamomile tea)
  - 3 Seed Tea—cumin, caraway, fennel (30 minute infusion), 1 cup after meals, or as needed

Chronic digestive disturbances associated with mood, emotional disorders or dysphoria

- Weakened immune status can affect mood, energy. Recent discovery of direct neural pathway between gut and brain; gut produces about 50% of serotonin, other neurotransmitters—SP Qi tonics (see below)
- TCM—signs of Spleen Qi deficiency; use Spleen Qi tonics, etc. (TCM—Spleen system involves deeper aspect of the immune system—see my notes, won’t cover much in class)—SP Qi tonics like astragalus, Asian ginseng, atractylodes, depending on tongue picture
- Use herbs for digestion that also affect mood
  - Scullcap, wild lettuce, hops, German chamomile, Roman chamomile, wormwood, American ginseng, asafetida, lobelia, anise seed, mugwort, etc.; berberine-containing herbs
  - Of course pre-, and probiotics