

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.

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- 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, Prevacid, 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
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- 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 persistent 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
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- 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
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