

How to Treat Eczema with Chinese Medicine

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The word ‘eczema’ came from the Greek word that means ‘to boil over’. It is a general term for many types of skin inflammation. Clinically, there are 4 types of eczema, namely, atopic, varicose, discoid and contact / dermatitis. Eczema is one of most common conditions in infants, at least half of those cases clear by age 3. In adults, it is generally a chronic or reoccurring cases. It can affect any part of the body, male or female, marked by itching on the affected areas, polymorphic skin lesion and frequent recurrence.

In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), there are many different names for eczema. For example, if eczema occurs in infants, it is called ‘*Nai Xian*’ and ‘*Tai Lian Chuang*’ (infantile eczema); if eczema is on the external ear, it is called ‘*Xuan Er Chuang*’ (eczema of the external ear); if eczema on the local areas, it is named ‘*Shi Du Chuang*’ (damp and noxious eczema); if eczema is on the scrotum, it is termed as ‘*Shen Nang Feng*’ (scrotal eczema) or ‘*Xiu Qiu Feng*’ (scrotal eczema), and if at the elbow and fossa poplitea, it is called ‘*Si Wan Feng*’ (atopic eczema), etc.

Cause and Pathology

In Western medicine, the exact cause of eczema is not known yet, although it is activated from the immune system as well as related to allergic reactions.

Some scholars believe that certain things could cause eczema to ‘flare-up’ or get worse, including: changes in temperature or humidity; chemical irritants, such as pesticides, paint strippers, alcohol, astringents, perfumes, harsh soaps, and detergents; physical irritants, such as clothes made of rough or scratchy fabrics, like wool; allergies, such as dust, pollen, animal dander; intense emotion or stress, and any kind of infection, etc.

In TCM theory, eczema is caused by exogenous wind-heat-dampness, which attacks the body from the exterior and combines with the endogenous damp-heat accumulating together at the skin. This pathogenic change obstructs the circulation of blood, so that blood stasis forms at the skin marked by maculae and papules all over the body; as for strong itching, it is caused by pathogenic wind getting into the blood and skin.

Clinical Manifestation

1. Acute eczema (wind-dampness with heat in the blood): there is diffuse redness, clusters of red papules, blisters, erosions with burning sensation of skin, marked by severe itching and some erosion from skin, red tongue with thick and yellow fur and slippery and rapid pulse.

2. Subacute eczema (damp-heat-wind with dryness in the blood): there is a sensation of itching, crust formation, pigmentation, scaly desquamation, red papules, red brown spots, blisters and exudation on the affected areas, accompanied with red tongue with yellow fur, and slippery pulse.
3. Chronic eczema (wind-heat with deficiency of blood): the skin becomes thick and rough with skin desquamation, pigmentation, sensation of itching, accompanied by light red tongue with white fur, and moderate pulse.

Main Points in Diagnosis

Clinically, eczema can be diagnosed as the following 4 types:

1. Atopic eczema: Atopic means extra sensitivity to certain substances (allergens), such as dust mites, cat and dog fur, etc. It is the most common form of eczema, affecting 15-22% young children in U.K. which is often linked to hay fever and asthma.
2. Varicose eczema: It is associated with varicose veins and is often a pre-cursor to varicose vein problems, mostly affecting the lower legs of patients, the middle age and elderly in particular.
3. Contact /dermatitis eczema: It can be either an acute or chronic skin reaction where is sensitivity to particular materials. This action may be an allergic or non-allergic reaction.
4. Discoid eczema: It tends to affect the lower legs and feet and shows itself as a distinct round patch of eczema, appearing at later stage in life.

In the UK, G.P and specialists usually identify eczema by looking at the rash and asking questions about how it appeared. They may also scrape some scales off the rash and check it under the microscope to make sure the rash is not caused by fungus and other infections. A skin lesion biopsy may be performed, but is not always required to make the diagnosis.

Treatments in Traditional Chinese Medicine

1. Acupuncture
 - (a) Body acupuncture

Basic acupoints:

Quchi(LI 11)

Geshu(B 17)

Xuehai(Sp 10)

Zusanli(S 36)

Fengchi(G20)

Method: To use the filiform needles to puncture the above points with reducing method, retain the needles for 20-30 minutes.

(b) Ear acupuncture:

Basic acupoints:

Pt.Lung

Pt.Adrenal

Pt.Shenmen

Pt.Endocrine

Method: the auricular –seed –pressing is applicable.

2. Herbal Therapy

(a) Acute eczema(Wind –dampness with heat in the blood)

Therapeutic principle: Clearing away pathogenic wind, heat and dampness and cooling the blood.

Formula: Modified Decoction for Acute Eczema

Ingredients:

Jinyinhua(Flos Lonicerae)15g

Baixuanpi(Cortex dictamni radices)15g

Huashi(Talcum) 10g

Yiyiren(Semen coicis)15g

Huangbai(Cortex phellodendri)9g

Huangqin(Radix scutellariae)9g

Yinchen(Herba artemisiae scopariae)9g

Cheqianzhi(Semen plantaginis)9g (to be wrapped with a piece of cloth before it is decocted)

Cangzhu(Rhizoma atractylodis)9g

Kusheng(Radix sophorae flavescens)9g

Gancao(Radix glycyrrhizae)9g

Mudanpi(Cortex moutan radices)10g

Directions: All the above herbs should be mixed and decocted in water for 20-30 minutes, and then get their tea/decoction for oral use, the half is to be taken in the morning and half in the evening. According to my experience, this formula is most effective at treating eczema.

(b) Subacute eczema(Damp-heat-wind with dryness in the blood)

Therapeutic principle: Clearing away pathogenic heat-dampness and nourishing the skin.

Formula: *Pi Fu Bing Xue Du Wan*/Pill

Ingredients:

Fuling(Poria)5.8%
Baimaogen(Rhizoma imperatae)5.8%
Qianchaoge (Radix rubiae) 2.9%
Taoren (Semen persicae)2.9%
Jingjieshuitan (Spica schizonepetae)2.9%
Chishao(Radix paeoniae rubra) 2.9%
Danggui(Radix angelicae sinensis)2.9%
Difuzi(Fructus kochiae)2.9%
Cang'erzi(Fructus xanthii) 2.9%
Shengdihuang(Radix Rehmaniae)2.9%
Lianqiao(Fructus forsythiae)2.9%
Jinyinhua(Flos lonicerae)2.9%
Kudiding(Herba violae)2.9%
Tufuling(Rhizoma smilacis)2.9%
Zaojiaoci(Spina gleditsiae)2.9%
Jiegeng(Radix platycodi)2.9%
Yimucao(Herba leonuri)2.9%
Kuxingren(Semen armeniacae amarum)2.9%
Baoshao(Radix paeoniae alba)2.9%
Niubangzi(Fructus arctii)2.9%
Mudanpi(Cortex moutan radice)2.9%
Baixuanpi(Cortex dictamni radice)2.9%
Shudihuang(Radix rehmanniae)2.9%
Dahuang(Radix et rhizome rhei)2.9%
Tiankuizi(Radix semiaquilegiae)2.9%
Jixueteng(Caulis spatholobi seu mucunae)2.9%
Rendongteng (Caulis lonicerae)2.9%
Tubeimu(Rhizoma bolbostemmatis)2.9%
Gancao(Radix glycyrrhizae)2.9%
Fangfeng(Radix saposchnikoviae)2.9%
Zicao(Radix arnebiae seu lithospermi)1.7%
Baizi(Radix angelicae dahuricae)1.7%
Fuping(Herba spirodelae)1.7%
Honghua(Flos carthami)1.7%
Chuanxiong(Rhizoma ligustici chuanxiong)1.6%

Usage: 8 pills each time, 3 times a day.

3. Chronic eczema(Wind-heat with deficiency of blood)

Therapeutic principle: nourishing the blood, moistening the dryness and expelling pathogenic wind-heat-dampness.

Formula: *Si Du Qing Jiao Nang*/Capsule

Ingredients:

Shengdihuang(Radix rhemanniae)
Danggui(Radix angelicae sinensis)
Dansheng(Radix codonopsis)
Kusheng(Radix sophorae flavescens)
Huangqin(Radix astragali seu hedysari)
Baixuanpi(Cortex dictamni radice)
Tufuling(Rhizoma smilacis glabrae)
Gancao(Radix glycyrrhizae)

Directions: 3-4 capsules each time, 3 times a day.

4. Herbal Cream

Formula: *Fu Qian Gao* /Cream

Ingredients:

Danshen (Radix salvia miltiorrhizae)20%
Danggui(Radix angelica sinensis)12%
Shashen Radix giehniae)15%
Heizima(Semen sesame nigrum)8%
Honghua (Flos carthami) 18%
Shuwuteng (Radix polygoni multiflori)16%
Cijili (Fructus tribuli) 11%.

Directions: At first, wash the affected areas, and then apply it on the skin, 3-4times a day.

Notes: There is a full supply for the above herbs in our Everwell clinic.

Prevention and Dietary Advice

1. Try to learn your eczema triggers and avoid them, for example, some patients with eczema find that it is helpful to move carpets from their house, and give pets dander treatments.
2. Wear cotton or soft fabrics ,avoid tight-fitting, rough , or scratchy clothing, and wear gloves at night to minimize skin damage from scratching;

3. Take lukewarm baths and showers, use mild soap or non-soap cleanser; after bath, gently pat your skin dry with a soft towel, don't rub the skin, and you may also apply a moisturizer within 3 minutes after bathing to 'lock in' the moisture; avoid rapid changes of temperature.
4. Avoid physical fatigue and mental stress, take a quieter route to work, if possible to get a new job.
5. New studies have shown that children who are breast-fed are less likely to get eczema; it is also true when the nursing mother has avoided cow's milk in her diet. Other dietary restriction may include eggs, fish, peanuts and soy.
6. Get an adequate sleep.

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