

TRADITIONAL
CHINESE MEDICINE
HEALING CENTER

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Inside this issue:

Prevention and
Treatment of
Seasonal Allergies 1

Welcome to the
World! 2



Got Qi?

Spring 2012

Prevention and Treatment of Seasonal Allergies with Traditional Chinese Medicine

By Florence Lim, L.Ac., DAOM

Spring is the season when we see an increasing number of patients suffering from allergies, hayfever, and other respiratory conditions. It is a season marked by the sound of chirping birds, colorful flowers blooming everywhere, and days that seem to last a bit longer than the darker, cold months of Winter. For most people, Spring is a great time to start going outdoors more often and enjoy the fresh air and beauty that nature has to offer. Our bodies also go through a sort of “awakening,” as the sunnier days make us feel more energized. At the same time, however, excess pathogens which have accumulated in our bodies from past seasons such as Dampness, Wind, and Heat may rise to the surface and express themselves as chronic cough, asthma, skin conditions, and other respiratory illnesses such as allergic rhinitis. These issues may become exacerbated if our bodies are already out of balance, or we are hypersensitive to various allergens in our environment such as tree pollens which are prevalent during the Spring. It is common, therefore, for us to experience an influx of patients with respiratory and allergy-related issues during the Spring.

Allergies and other respiratory conditions have effectively been treated with Chinese medicine without any negative side effect for the past 2,000 years or more. In China, it is common to see 50 or more patients per day lined up to see a Chinese medicine doctor *just* to treat his or her chronic cough or allergies. As opposed to western medications such as antihistamines, decongestants, and steroids, which can only alleviate the immediate, acute symptoms of allergic conditions, Chinese medicine is also able to deal with the root cause of allergies by improving the individual’s overall health and minimizing his or her susceptibility to disease.

Causes

From a Western medicine point of view, allergies are caused by a hyperactive immune system responding to various allergens in the environment such as dust, pollen, mold, or animal dander. The body releases certain active substances such as prostaglandins, leukotrienes, and histamines - which dilate the blood vessels, increase capillary permeability, cause smooth muscles contractions, and increase the number of white blood cells in the tissues and blood - every time it comes into contact with these allergens. The result is a runny nose, itchy eyes and throat, a feeling of pressure in the sinus cavities, headaches, asthma, or skin conditions such as eczema and hives.

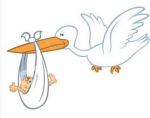
From a Chinese medicine point of view, the expression of allergies is considered your body’s natural way of eliminating any lodged excess pathogens. How do these pathogens become lodged within our bodies in the first place? Various protective membranes, or barriers, exist within our bodies which protect us from the influence of “toxic” materials such as viruses, pollutants, and bacteria. In Chinese medicine, we call these toxic materials “pathogens,” and often refer to them as “heat pathogens,” “cold pathogens,” “wind pathogens,” “damp heat toxins,” etc. Our protective barriers are what is considered “Wei Qi,” which can be translated as “Defensive Qi,” from a TCM point of view. Our skin and the lining of our respiratory and digestive tracts serve as our first and foremost defensive barriers which protect us from pathogens in the outside world. The integrity of these systems depends on the proper functioning of all the cells that make up the various tissues, membranes, and lining of our various organs. Eating too many rich foods or too



Cont’d on Page 2

**Congratulations
Expecting Mothers!**

Sarah H. Katya F.
 Lisa O. Danika C.
 Susan O. Suzanne S.
 Jennifer D. Fariba G.
 Vanessa P. Jody B.
 Jessica M. Michelle T.
 Christina S. Marisa K.
 Deborah L. Sylvia F.
 Elizabeth K. Naisha L.
 Dawn S. Katherine N.
 Bridget M. Ursula W.
 Tamsin R.



Welcome to the World!

Jaylan



Born to Anneli & Michael
 On October 26, 2011
 7 lbs. 13 oz., 18.5 inches

Diego



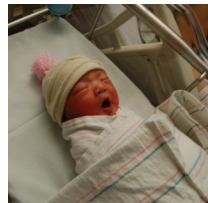
Born to Leticia & Paul
 On February 26, 2012
 7 lbs. 9 oz., 20 inches

Philip & Mila



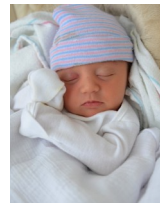
Born to Gillian & Abram
 On February 10, 2012
 Philip: 6 lbs., 8 oz., 19.5 inches
 Mila: 6 lbs., 6 oz., 21 inches

Helena



Born to Karyn & Marcus
 On March 12, 2012
 6 lbs 7 oz., 20 inches

Anaís



Born to Jenna & Mark
 On March, 11, 2012
 6 lbs. 12 oz., 19.5

John



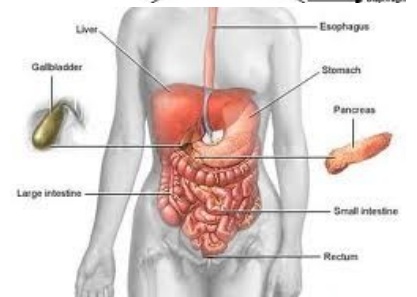
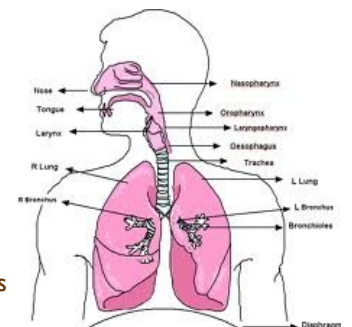
Born to Gina & Jason
 On March 15, 2012
 6 lbs., 12 oz., 19 inches



Cont'd from Page 1

much sugar, exposing ourselves to environmental pollutants in the air we breathe or in things we come into contact with such as mold, dust, and chemicals, not getting enough sleep or stressing and worrying too much – all these things can negatively influence how our bodies function at a cellular level, making it easier for external pathogens to invade our protective Wei Qi and become lodged inside the body. Our Wei Qi is like our body's protective bubble. The bubble can take a few hits every now and then, while still being able to bounce back to normal shape. But if the bubble itself is not strong and resilient enough to start off with, or if there are too many external pathogens eating away at the outer core of this protective bubble layer, soon the integrity of the bubble begins to collapse and holes begin to appear. When this happens, it becomes much easier for external pathogens such as allergens within the environment to break through the protective bubble. In an attempt to fight off what the body sees as a foreign pathogen being lodged within itself, it activates the immune system to fight off these invading substances. The mucous membranes of the nasal cavity and respiratory tract become overactive, resulting in asthma, allergic rhinitis, eczema, and even hives. The resulting symptoms – the runny nose, itchy eyes, post-nasal drip, itchy or oozing skin rashes – are considered a form of Phlegm or Damp stagnation within the body. From a Chinese medicine perspective, the pores of the skin are directly linked to the Lungs, and therefore, anything affecting the Lungs and respiratory system often affects the skin as well.

Furthermore, if the lining of the intestinal tract is compromised, making it more permeable to bacteria and toxic byproducts of undigested foods, these substances can enter through the semi-permeable walls of the intestines and into the bloodstream, resulting in an inflammatory response similar to that seen in the respiratory system when it is irritated by allergens in the environment. Besides respiratory, skin, and digestive symptoms, other autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis may be associated with a compromised intestinal lining.



Cont'd on Page 3

Treating Allergies with Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture: How Does It Work?

Western medication such as steroids, antihistamines, bronchodilators, and decongestants may be useful for acute respiratory or allergic episodes and can temporarily suppress the immediate symptoms such as sneezing, red and itchy eyes, sinus drip, or wheezing, but they are only temporary solutions and often come with negative side effects such as high blood pressure, palpitations, edema, weight gain, rashes, or drowsiness. Rather than suppressing your symptoms, which Western medicine often does, the use of Chinese medicine - which includes the use of herbs, acupuncture, self-massage, and nutrition – works by reconnecting and freeing the flow of energy through all 12 energy channels, thus optimizing overall cellular functioning within the body. In other words, Chinese medicine improves the communication, signaling, and transportation of material between cells and brings your body back to a state of energetic balance so that your defenses are strengthened and external pathogens (viruses, bacteria, yeast, mold, etc.) can no longer become easily lodged within the body. This way, both the symptoms and the root cause are taken care of. From a Chinese medicine point of view, allergic symptoms are considered a normal response of your body trying to eliminate the pathogen and should therefore *not* be suppressed. Doing so is a surefire way of making the symptoms come back later, and often with more vengeance than before.



It is best to come in for acupuncture treatments and to start taking your herbs *before* allergy season even starts! Getting treatment at least one month before allergy season can help strengthen your Wei Qi so that you are not as likely to suffer such severe allergic complaints once allergy season arrives. The symptoms can be relieved quite quickly with the help of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture treatments, but in order to improve your overall immunity and prevent future allergic flare-ups in the long term, it is highly recommended to get regular treatments and take your herbs consistently for at least 3 to 6 months, depending on the severity of your symptoms. It takes time to open up all 12 channels, especially if someone has very 'stuck' or 'congested' energy.

Prevent Allergies and Improve Immunity by Strengthening Your Spleen Qi

What is responsible for the strength of our defensive Wei Qi and for enhancing the function of each and every cell in our bodies? The answer lies in a healthy Spleen Qi! The Spleen is responsible for the absorption and transformation of the food we eat into the Qi, Blood, and energy production that our body needs for sustenance. If the Spleen is healthy, then it will create a strong defensive Wei Qi to protect the exterior of the body from invasion of external pathogens, and the body will function better as a whole. A person with weak Spleen Qi often has chronically loose stools or undigested food in the stools, feels dizzy or fatigued, has cold hands and feet, often gets sick, and is often averse to the cold; fluids more easily accumulate in the body, resulting in Dampness/Phlegm type of symptoms such as allergies, chronic productive cough, and runny nose. In Chinese medicine, the Spleen corresponds with the Earth element and is the mother organ of the Lungs, or Metal element. When the Earth element is weak, it will hinder the function of the Metal element. Thus, if the Spleen Qi is weak, it is also easier for Dampness and Phlegm to accumulate in the Lung system, which governs our respiratory system as well as our skin.



Diet. One can improve his or her Spleen Qi by eating an overall balanced diet consisting mainly of warm, cooked vegetables, proteins, whole grains (such as rice, quinoa, and millet), and complex carbohydrates, which nourish the Spleen energy. Sugar, alcohol, dairy products, fruit juices, sodas, caffeine, refined carbohydrates, wheat and gluten-containing products, oily or fried foods, and cold, raw foods and beverages should be avoided because they damage the Spleen Qi and engender more Dampness. Cold, chilled foods such as iced tea, ice cream, and raw vegetables are especially damaging to the Spleen energy. Our digestive systems work best when foods and drinks are either room temperature or close to body temperature. For someone with a weak or compromised Spleen Qi, it is also important to keep meals simple and bland. Eating too many different types of foods in one sitting may put excess burden on the Spleen.



Probiotics. Probiotics, which are found in foods such as yogurt, sauerkraut, certain fermented foods such as natto (a Japanese fermented soybean dish), or in probiotic supplements can also strengthen Spleen Qi by allowing beneficial bacteria in the intestines to flourish, thereby preventing harmful, pathogenic bacteria from entering into the blood stream via the intestinal walls. Some patients have reported an overall improvement in their immune response and digestion after taking bovine colostrum supplements, which are composed of the early milk produced a few days after delivery by a lactating cow. Bovine colostrum is rich in immunoglobulins, which have antiviral and antibacterial properties. If you are allergic to dairy, you can purchase non-dairy probiotic sources.



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Cont'd from Page 3

Exercise. Regular, moderate exercise that gets your heart pumping and reduces stress also benefits the Spleen Qi by improving the circulation and transformation of Qi, Blood, and fluids throughout the body. Whether it be walking, swimming, jogging, Qi Gong, or Yoga - these are all beneficial for improving your health and immunity, and for transforming and eliminating excess Dampness and Phlegm which may have become lodged within the Lung or Spleen systems. People who have exercise-induced asthma attacks should be extra cautious when beginning a new exercise regime. It's best to start off slowly and gradually build up your intensity over time.

Massage. Applying acupressure to certain acupuncture points along the body on a regular basis can help balance your energy, improve your health and immunity, as well as strengthen the Spleen, Lungs, and Wei Qi. Massage works similarly to acupuncture, bringing balance and homeostasis to the body by keeping the energy flowing smoothly through all major energy channels. When there is Qi stagnation or blocked energy channels within the body, sickness and disease may result. Massage is an effective way of keeping the Qi flowing smoothly through these channels. Below are several self-massage exercises you can do (or someone can do for you) to open up the sinuses, strengthen Spleen and Lung Qi, and improve your immune function. These exercises should be performed daily to obtain the necessary health benefits.

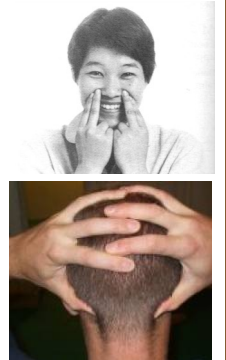
Make an arch above and below the eyes: Rest your thumbs on either temple. Using the middle knuckles of the index fingers of both hands, push outwards from the inner tips of the eyebrows towards the temples. The knuckles should be making an arch right along the upper ridge of the eyebrows. Then, draw another arch with both knuckles under the eye socket, starting at the inner tips of the eyebrows, traveling along either side of the nose, and outwards towards the outer tips of the cheekbones. Repeat 25 times.

Massage Ying Xiang (LI20): With the tips of the middle fingers of both hands, apply firm but gentle pressure and make 50 small circles on either side of the wings of the nose.

Massage Feng Chi (GB20): These two points are located in a depression on either side of the back of the neck, between the upper tip of the muscles of the sternocleidomastoid muscle and the trapezius muscle. When you press on these two points with your thumbs, you will often feel a tender or sore sensation. Continue massaging and pressing these points until you feel a light sweat, and the muscles here begin to relax.

Massage Fei Shu (UB13) and up the neck: Fei Shu is made up of two acupuncture points which are located on the upper back, on either side of the spine, about 1.5 inches lateral to the lower border of the spinous process of the third thoracic vertebrae (T3). In Chinese, "Fei" means "lung." Consequently, these two points help to strengthen the Lungs and immune system when massaged regularly. Use the pads of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th fingers of your right hand to massage Fei Shu on the right side of your back. Make 25 small circles while pressing firmly into the area. Then you can work your way up towards the nape of the neck and massage the neck and trapezius muscles until the area feels more relaxed. Repeat on the left side. If someone else can massage these points for you, it's even better!

Massage Zu San Li (ST36): ST36 is located on the lower leg, about three inches below the outside corner of the kneecap. This point helps to strengthen the immune system and the Spleen/Stomach digestive system as well. Use the tips of both thumbs to press and knead into these areas, about 25 times.



With allergy season in full blast at this time of year, we hope the information and tips we've provided here will help you breathe a little more easily. If you can eliminate what's bad for you, add into your life more of what's good for you, and come in for regular acupuncture and herbal treatments, you'll be well on your way to better health and an allergy-less Spring!