

PAINFUL PERIODS

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AETIOLOGY AND PATHOLOGY

1) EMOTIONAL STRAIN

Emotional strain is a very important aetiological factor.

Anger, frustration, resentment, worry, guilt may lead to Liver-Qi stagnation.

In women, Liver-Qi stagnation causes Blood to stagnate in the Uterus leading to painful periods.

In some cases, stagnant Liver-Qi may turn into Liver-Fire and this, in turn, may lead to Blood-Heat. Blood-Heat often combines with Damp-Heat in the Uterus.

2) COLD AND DAMPNESS

Excessive exposure to cold and dampness, especially during the puberty years, may cause Cold to invade the Uterus.

Cold contracts and causes stasis of Blood in the Uterus and therefore painful periods.

In cold and damp countries where young girls dressed in shorts play school sports and games, this is a very common cause of painful periods. During puberty, the body is in a vulnerable state because it is undergoing profound changes, and it is therefore very likely to be affected by pathogenic factors.





“The Liver pertains to Wood, it stores Blood and it hates wind and cold most of all. During menstruation the space between skin and muscles [cou li] is wide open, when this is invaded by wind and cold Liver-Qi stagnates and the passages of the menses become obstructed.”

Fu Qing Zhu

Women are also prone to invasion of Cold in the Uterus during and soon after the period when the Uterus and Blood are in a relatively weakened state. At this time women should take particular care not to be exposed to cold and dampness.

3) OVERWORK, CHRONIC ILLNESS

Physical overwork or a chronic illness leads to deficiency of Qi and Blood, especially of Stomach and Spleen. Deficiency of Blood leads to malnourishment of the Chong and Ren Vessels so that the Blood has no force to move properly thus causing stagnation and pain.

4) EXCESSIVE SEXUAL ACTIVITY, CHILDBIRTH

The Liver and Kidneys are weakened by excessive sexual activity (which affects women somewhat less than men), too many childbirths too close together, and sexual activity starting too early. A deficiency of Liver and Kidneys induces emptiness of the Chong and Ren Mai so that they cannot move Qi and Blood properly, thus causing painful periods.



The main patterns causing Painful Periods are:

Full

Stagnation of Qi

Stagnation of Cold (of the Empty- or Full-type)

Damp-Heat (with Blood-Heat)

Stagnant Liver-Qi turning into Fire

Empty

Qi and Blood deficiency

Yang and Blood deficiency

Liver- and Kidney-Yin deficiency

DIAGNOSIS

Time of onset

Pain before and during the period is usually of the Full type

Pain after the period is of the Empty type.

Pressure

Pain worse with pressure: Full

Pain relieved by pressure: Empty

Ask the patient whether she likes to hold her abdomen or whether she dislikes to be touched on the abdomen at that time.

Women often find that a hot-water bottle on the abdomen relieves the pain, but sometimes they like the *pressure* rather than the heat of the bottle.



Heat-Cold

Pain relieved by heat (i.e. hot-water bottle): Cold or Stasis of Blood from Cold

Bear in mind other conditions, such as stagnation of Qi or Blood, may also be alleviated by the application of a hot-water bottle.

A sensation of heat is often comforting in itself without really indicating that the pain is due to Cold.

Pain aggravated by heat: Blood-Heat

Character of pain

Pain better after passing clots: stasis of Blood.

Pain with a pronounced feeling of distension: stagnation of Qi.

Burning pain: Blood-Heat.

Cramping pain: Cold in the Uterus.

Stabbing pain, not moving: stasis of Blood.

Pulling pain: stasis of Blood.

Bearing-down pain before the period: stasis of Blood.

Bearing-down pain after the period: Kidney deficiency.

Location of pain

- Pain on both sides of lower abdomen: Liver channel.
- Pain in lower abdomen, central: Kidney channel and Chong Vessel.
- Pain on sacrum: Kidney channel, Deficiency.

Cycle

Long cycle (i.e. periods consistently late) and dark and clotted menstrual blood: Cold in the Uterus

Red menstrual blood with small dark clots: Cold in the Uterus

Short cycle, heavy period and bright-red blood: Blood-Heat

Menstrual blood

Dark, with dark clots: Blood stasis

Light blood with small dark clots: Cold in Uterus

Period that starts and stops

Period that starts or ends with brown discharge

PRINCIPLES OF TREATMENT

Manifestation (*Biao*) = central pathology of Painful Periods is disharmony of the Chong Mai and Sea of Blood.

Main treatment principle = regulate the Qi and Blood of the Chong Mai. The Chong Mai is the Sea of Blood.

The Chong Mai arises from the Uterus and is always involved in Painful Periods. It is particularly prone to stagnation of Qi and Blood in the abdomen and many of its points (especially KI-14 Siman) eliminate stagnation.

