

CHEST *BI* SYNDROME (*XIONG BI* 胸痹)



Giovanni Maciocia

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CHEST BI SYNDROME

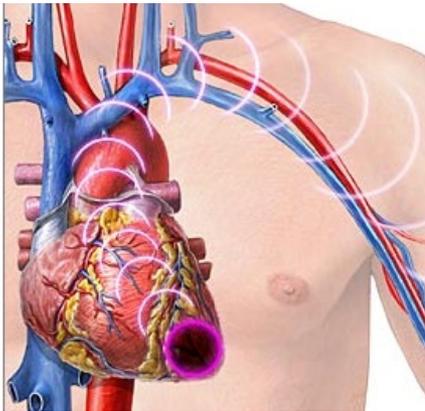
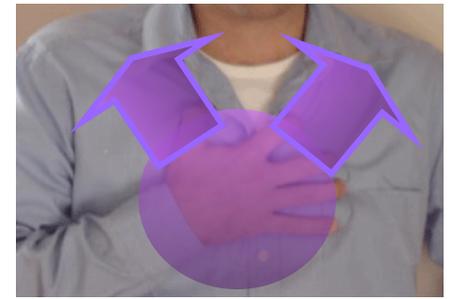
Full

- Stagnation of Qi in the Chest
- Heart-Blood stasis
- Turbid Phlegm stagnating in the Chest
- Stagnation of Cold in the Chest
- Liver-Fire harassing the Heart in the chest

Empty

- Spleen- and Heart-Yang deficiency
- Qi and Yin deficiency
- Heart- and Kidney-Yin deficiency

The condition which goes under the name of “Chest Bi” (where *Bi* means “obstruction”) is characterized by a feeling of oppression and pain in the chest, extending to the shoulders.



In severe cases the pain is greater than the sensation of oppression and in very severe cases there is a stabbing pain in the heart region on the left side of the chest extending to the left shoulder and down the left arm.

The *Bi* in “Chest *Bi*” is composed by the radical for “disease” and a character indicating “obstruction”. The fact that the word *Bi* here is the same as that in *Bi* Syndrome, i.e. ache in the joints from invasion of Wind, Cold and Dampness, should not induce us to make any correlations between these two very different conditions.

In *Bi* Syndrome, only the channels and joints are affected; in Chest *Bi*, the Internal Organs are also affected. Moreover, Chest *Bi* may correspond to very different types of diseases than *Bi* Syndrome, such as coronary heart disease, angina pectoris, chronic bronchitis, pulmonary emphysema or cancer of the lungs.

The image shows a large, bold Chinese character, 痹 (Bì), which is the character for 'Bi' in the context of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is composed of the radical 疒 (disease) on the left and 疒 (obstruction) on the right.

The “obstruction” in Chest Bi Syndrome is obstruction in the circulation of Qi and Blood in the chest by Qi stagnation, Blood stasis, Phlegm or Cold.

The symptoms of Chest Bi (but not this name) are mentioned in the Nei Jing.

The “Su Wen” in chapter 22 says:

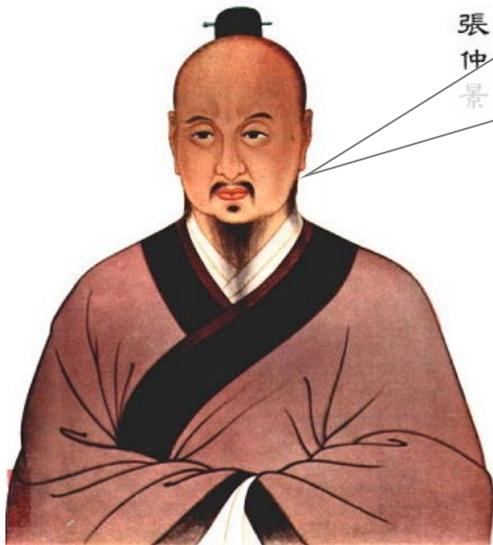
“When the Heart is diseased there is pain in the centre of the chest, hypochondrial fullness and pain, pain involving the chest, back and scapulae as well as both arms.”

The “Ling Shu” in chapter 24 says: *“In True Heart Pain the arms and legs are cyanotic and cold up to the elbows and knees and there is severe pain in the heart region.”*

“True Heart Pain” corresponds to a severe type of Chest Bi.

During the Han dynasty, Zhang Zhong Jing in the “Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Chest (*Jin Gui Yao Lue*) introduced the term “Chest Bi” (*Xiong Bi*) for the first time. In chapter 9 he says:

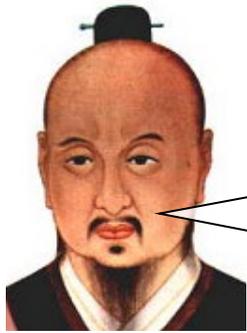
“In Chest Bi there is breathlessness, cough, pain in the chest and back, the Cun pulse is Deep and Slow and the Chi position it is Tight and Rapid. Use Gua Lou Xie Bai Bai Jiu Tang Trichosanthes-Allium-White Wine Decoction.”



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Here “Slow” and “Rapid” do not refer to the actual rate of the pulse (which could not be Slow in one position and Rapid in another), but to the feeling of the pulse.

In the same chapter he says:



“In Chest Bi when the patient cannot lie down and heart pain extends to the back, use Gua Lou Xie Bai Ban Xia Tang Trichosanthes-Allium-Pinellia Decoction.”

The “Causes of Diseases and Treatment according to the Pulse” (1706) says: *“Pain over the sternum indicates Chest Bi...the internal causes of Chest Bi are the 7 emotions and the 6 excessive desires. They stir Heart-Fire and affect the Lungs. They may also cause rebellious Qi to damage the Lung passages, Phlegm to accumulate and Qi to stagnate. Chest Bi may also be caused by excessive consumption of hot-pungent foods which injure the Upper Burner and cause Blood to stagnate. This leads to a feeling of oppression and pain of the chest.”*

Traditionally, there are three types of Chest Bi:

a) *Xin Tong* (Heart-pain): pain in the chest.



b) *Zhen Xin Tong* (True Heart-pain): pain in the chest with cyanosis of face, arms and feet.



c) *Jue Xin Tong* (Breakdown Heart-pain): pain in the chest with cold limbs.

From a Western medical perspective, Chest Bi may correspond to several different diseases, pertaining to the heart or the lungs.



If there is pain in the left side of the chest, palpitations and shortness of breath, it may correspond to heart diseases such as angina pectoris, myocardial infarction or coronary heart disease.

If there is a cough, breathlessness and expectoration of phlegm, it may correspond to such lung diseases as chronic bronchitis, chronic tracheitis, pulmonary emphysema or cancer of the lungs.



Examples of patterns corresponding to lung diseases may be "Turbid Phlegm stagnating in the chest" or "Spleen- and Heart-Yang deficiency". In some cases, Chest Bi may correspond to chronic gastritis.

The discussion of Chest Painful Obstruction Syndrome will be discussed according to the following topics:

1. Aetiology

- a) External pathogenic factors**
- b) Diet**
- c) Emotional problems**
- d) Old age**

2. Pathology

3. Differential diagnosis

- a) Phlegm-fluids in chest-hypochondrium**
- b) Epigastric pain**
- c) True heart pain**

4. Treatment strategies

5. Identification of patterns and treatment

Full Conditions

- a) Stagnation of Qi in the Chest**
- b) Heart-Blood stasis**
- c) Turbid Phlegm stagnating in the Chest**
- d) Stagnation of Cold in the Chest**
- e) Liver-Fire harassing the Heart in the chest**

Empty Conditions

- a) Spleen- and Heart-Yang deficiency**
- b) Qi and Yin deficiency**
- c) Heart- and Kidney-Yin deficiency.**

6. Prognosis and prevention

7. Modern Chinese literature

8. Clinical trials

9. Western differential diagnosis

1. AETIOLOGY

a) EXTERNAL PATHOGENIC FACTORS

External Cold can invade the chest and obstruct the circulation of Yang Qi in the chest. The obstruction of Yang Qi leads to Chest Bi with the ensuing feeling of oppression and pain in the chest. External Cold is all the more likely to invade the body if there is a pre-existing deficiency of Yang. In particular, a deficiency of Yang of the Lungs or Heart will predispose the body to invasion of Cold in the chest.

The “Methods and Rules of Medicine” (1658) says:

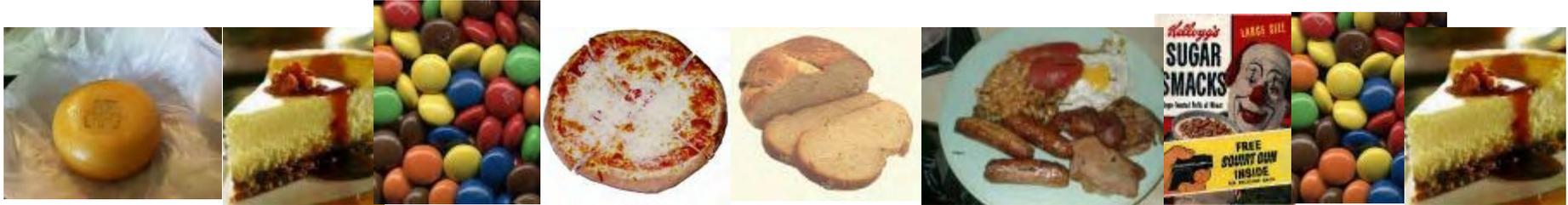
“In Chest Bi, pain in the heart region is caused by Yang deficiency and invasion of Cold.”

The “Treatment Planning according to Syndrome Categories” (1839) says:

“In Chest Bi, Yang Qi of the chest does not move; after a long time Yin takes the place of Yang.”

b) DIET

Irregular eating and excessive consumption of fats, sweets, dairy foods or cold-raw foods injure the Spleen and Stomach.



As a result, these cannot transform food and transport food essences, and Phlegm is formed. Phlegm obstructs the blood vessels leading to stagnation of Qi and Blood. Stasis of Blood in the chest blocks the circulation of Yang Qi in the chest and this leads to Chest Bi.

In Chest Bi Syndrome, there is often an interaction between Phlegm and Blood stasis as these two pathogenic factors aggravate each other.