

DISEASES AFTER CHILDBIRTH



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The period considered here is the first few weeks after delivery, called the *puerperium* in Western medicine.



In Chinese medicine, this period was called *chan ru*: *chan* means “childbirth” and *ru* means “cotton mattress”. This name gives an immediate indication about Chinese recommendations regarding the length of bed rest required after childbirth.

The old doctors placed the emphasis on different aspects of the period after delivery: some said that the three main conditions at this time are:

convulsions (now rare)

invasions of external pathogenic factors

and constipation

These three conditions were called *san bing* (三病), i.e. the “three diseases”.

Others considered the three main problems as being vomiting, sweating and diarrhoea: these were called *san ji* (三及), i.e. the “three emergencies”. Yet other doctors emphasized the *san chong* (三冲), meaning “three upward rebellions”, i.e. depleted Blood rebelling upwards in the Penetrating Vessel towards the Heart, Lungs or Stomach.



Zhang Zhong Jing says in his “Synopsis of Prescriptions from the Golden Chamber”:

“After childbirth the three main diseases are convulsions, collapse and constipation. After delivery, Blood is exhausted, the woman has perspired profusely, so that internal Wind develops and leads to convulsions. Exhaustion of Blood and profuse sweating may also allow Cold to invade leading to collapse. The exhaustion of body fluids leads to dryness of the Stomach and therefore constipation.”¹



1. He Ren 1981 A New Explanation of the Synopsis of Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet (Jin Kui Yao Lue Xin Jie), Zhejiang Science Publishing House, p. 177. The Synopsis of Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet was written by Zhang Zhong Jing ca AD 200.

Whatever the problems after childbirth, the puerperium is characterized by two major possible conditions:

a deficiency of Blood and/or Yin

or a stasis of Blood

The force required for delivery taxes the woman's Qi, the loss of blood during childbirth injures Blood and Yin, the sudden expulsion of the placenta injures the Original Qi, the Directing and Penetrating vessels are depleted and the blood vessels and channels are empty and prone to invasions by exterior pathogenic factors. All these factors mean that a Deficiency (of Qi, Blood, Yin) is the overriding pathological condition of women after childbirth. However, this is not to say that there are no Full conditions after delivery.

Zhang Jing Yue says in the “Complete Works of Jing Yue” (1624):

“After childbirth Blood is lost and there is often a Deficiency. However, there are conditions of Deficiency, conditions without Deficiency, and Excess conditions. In these three cases, one must consider the woman and the pattern to differentiate between Deficiency and Excess. In treatment, one must not stick to one’s views complacently and when one tonifies one must also pay attention to eliminating pathogenic factors.”²



2. Zhang Jing Yue 1986 The Complete Works of Jing Yue (Jing Yue Quan Shu), Shanghai Science and Technology Press, Shanghai, p. 669. First published in 1624.