



How to help your patients with liver disorders – Part 1

– using prepared Chinese medicines

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The liver diseases or disorders that are commonly encountered in clinic are:

1. Hepatitis B and C (mainly chronic presentations)
2. Gallstones
3. Cholecystitis
4. Fatty liver (steatohepatitis)
5. 'Sluggish' liver (a very common condition that is not recognized by Western medicine)

The Liver is the largest internal organ of the human body and weighs around 1.5kg in the average adult. Blood from the digestive system must first filter through the liver before it travels anywhere else in the body.

The liver performs around 500 different functions, which range from storing vitamins to eliminating wastes and by-products from the body; it aids the digestion of protein, fats and carbohydrates and helps regulate blood sugar levels and serum cholesterol.

The liver's basic functions are three fold: Vascular, Secretory and Metabolic. Vascular function includes being a major blood reservoir, filtering over a litre of blood every minute. The liver effectively removes bacteria, endotoxins, antibody complexes and various other particles from the circulation.

The liver secretes about one litre of bile every day. Bile is necessary for the digestion of fats as well as the absorption of fat-soluble substances. In addition, many toxic substances are eliminated through bile.

The metabolic functions of the liver are diverse: fat and carbohydrate metabolism, storage of vitamins and minerals, detoxification or excretion into the bile of various chemical compounds including hormones, drugs and pesticides.

A range of conditions can prevent the liver from performing its vital functions. These may include fat accumulation, alcohol misuse, viral infection, iron or copper accumulation, toxic damage and cancer.

The most common cause of liver disease is non-alcoholic fatty liver disease ('fatty liver'). Another common condition, referred to as sluggish liver, may occur when the liver becomes overstressed and is unable to process foods or detoxify as quickly as a healthy liver. Cirrhosis is the end-result of many liver conditions and involves severe scarring of the liver (with liver nodule formation). It is associated with a progressive decline in liver function resulting in liver failure.

In Australia we are much more likely to see patients with some degree of functional impairment of the liver (i.e. a sluggish liver) than those with acute hepatitis. The next common group of patients are those with gall bladder disorders and fatty liver, patients often presenting with both problems together. End stage liver disease, e.g. cirrhosis is generally handled by Western medicine in a hospital setting.

Traditional Chinese medicine has much to offer patients with Liver and Gallbladder disorders. Below are some of the commonly seen disorders with suggested treatments using prepared Chinese herbal medicines.

HEPATITIS (TYPES B AND C)

TCM syndrome patterns are commonly: Damp-Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder; Heat-Toxin accumulation; Liver constraint, Qi stagnation. Below are suggested treatment protocols a) for acute (or active) stage and b) for chronic, subacute (or inactive) stage.

a) Acute or active stage:

LIVER FUNCTION FORMULA

Combinations:

ANTI-INFLAMM FORMULA

(Severe cases with high fever, red tongue with a yellow and greasy coat.)

b) Chronic, subacute or inactive stage

LIVER TONIC FORMULA

Combinations:

DIGEST-AID FORMULA

(Poor digestion, bloating and loss of appetite)

GALLSTONES

In TCM gallstones are mainly due to Damp-Heat retained in the Gallbladder, which transforms the bile into stones. The disorder generally begins with Liver Qi constraint and Spleen Qi deficiency and develops when Heat from the Liver pathology combines with Damp from the Spleen disorder. **It should be noted that TCM treatment is not suitable for patients with stones greater than 1cm diameter.**

LI DAN PAI SHI WAN (Lysimachia & Artemisia Formula)

Combinations:

YIN CHEN HAO WAN - JIA WEI (Artemisia & Rhubarb Combination)

+ SI MIAO YONG AN WAN (Lonicera & Scrophularia Formula)

(Gallstones; stones less than 1cm in diameter)

How to help your patients with liver disorders *continued*

CHOLECYSTITIS

Acute cholecystitis is generally due to bacterial infection, causing fever and acute pain over the gall bladder. Chronic cholecystitis is often associated with gallstones and causes recurrent episodes of upper abdominal pain. Thus cases with chronic cholecystitis should be investigated for gallstones and treated appropriately

a) Acute cholecystitis:

LI DAN PAI SHI WAN (Lysimachia & Artemisia Formula)
+ **XIAO CHAI HU WAN** (Minor Bupleurum Formula)

Combinations:

+ **BAO HE WAN** (Citrus & Crataegus Formula)
(With loss of appetite, poor digestion)

b) Chronic cholecystitis:

LI DAN PAI SHI WAN (Lysimachia & Artemisia Formula)

Combinations:

YIN CHEN HAO WAN - JIA WEI (Artemisia & Rhubarb Combination)
SI MIAO YONG AN WAN (Lonicera & Scrophularia Formula)
(With gallstones. Note: stones must be less than 1cm diameter).

FATTY LIVER (steatohepatitis or hepatic steatosis)

Fatty liver refers to excessive accumulation of lipids in the liver cells and lipid accumulation exceeds 5% of liver weight. Alcoholism, obesity, and diabetes are the most common causes. Patients may present with right upper quadrant pain, tenderness, and/or jaundice or, in many cases be asymptomatic. Fatty liver is diagnosed with certainty only by liver biopsy. In TCM this condition is generally characterized by a mixed syndrome pattern with Damp-Heat in the Liver and Gall Bladder; Phlegm-Heat; and Blood stasis.

YIN CHEN HAO WAN - JIA WEI (Artemisia & Rhubarb Combination)
+ **NEI XIAO LUO LI WAN** (Prunella & Scrophularia Formula)
+ **JUE MING HUA TAN SHEN SHI WAN** (Polygonum & Crataegus Combination)

'SLUGGISH' LIVER

This condition, correlates with the TCM syndrome patterns of Liver Qi constraint, Liver Qi invading the Spleen/Stomach, Liver Qi constraint with stagnant Heat, Liver Fire, and Cold Damp disturbance of the Spleen. Patients may have a variety of presentations, commonly: fatigue, headaches, irritability and moodiness, indigestion, often with a history of allergies, and/or frequent infections. Generally patients have a combination of Liver, or Liver and Spleen pathologies. Treatment protocols for the common TCM presentations and are outlined below:

STRESS RELIEF FORMULA

(Liver Qi constraint with stagnant Heat)

LIVER DETOX FORMULA

(Liver Qi constraint with Qi stagnation and a mild degree of Blood stasis, Damp retention and Spleen deficiency - due to Liver Qi invading the Spleen.)

Combinations:

GUT DETOX FORMULA

(Bloating and flatulence, loose and malodorous stools)

DIGEST-AID FORMULA

(Poor digestion)

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