



中医 TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

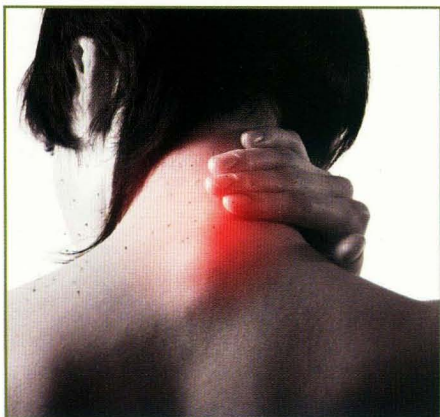
Fibromyalgia (FMS) - A Chinese Medicine Perspective

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Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition characterised by fatigue, pain in the muscles, ligaments and tendons, and multiple tender points on the body. While the exact cause remains unknown, there is evidence that people with fibromyalgia may be more sensitive to pain because of a malfunction with the body's usual pain perception processes. More women than men have fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia, while different for everyone who has it, tends to come and go throughout life. Although it can be debilitating for some people, it is not degenerative or life-threatening, and symptoms can be managed with professional and self care.

Signs and Symptoms

- Widespread pain and stiffness
- Tender points throughout the body
- Fatigue or trouble sleeping
- Paraesthesia (tingling)



Western Drug Therapies

Your Patients presenting with fibromyalgia (FMS) may already be taking some of the following drugs:

- Low doses of tricyclics or SSRI's.
- Analgesics e.g. non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- Muscle relaxants.
- Pain in specific spots in muscles may be treated with lidocaine or procaine (injected into points where pain is greatest) or with capsaicin (used topically).

Pattern Differentiations

Fibromyalgia is not recorded in traditional TCM literature. Although modern TCM literature tends to classify fibromyalgia as a type of *bi syndrome* (impediment syndrome), FMS has its own unusual characteristics, such as a complicated and varied symptom picture and the involvement of a wide range of organs and locations in the body. Hence, treatment approaches differ considerably. Most pattern differentiations, however, stress the involvement of the liver as shown in this pattern differentiation by Dr Liu Ying Chun of the TCM department, Xian City Number Five Hospital¹ (refer to the case studies below for examples of how patients with these patterns may present).

- Liver depression and spleen vacuity. Formula: *Xiao Yao San* [Bupleurum & Dang Gui Formula] adding Yuan Zhi [Polygala], Long Yan Rou [Arillus longan] and Ye Jiao Teng [Polygonum

stem] to nourish the heart and calm the spirit, and Xiang Fu [Cyperus] to course depressed liver qi.

- Liver depression transforming into fire, phlegm heat. Formula: *Wen Dan Tang* [Bamboo & Hoelen Combination], adding Wu Zhu Yu [Evodia] as it enters the liver and spleen channel, courses the liver and downbears qi, and also dries dampness and transforms dampness, Chuan Xiong [Cnidium] quickens blood, and Shi Chang Pu [Acorus] opens the orifices, diffuses qi and eliminates phlegm.
- Enduring liver qi depression damaging yin, liver kidney yin deficiency. Formula: *Liu Wei Di Huang Tang* [Rehmannia Six Combination] adding Xuan Shen [Scrophularia], Mai Men Dong [Ophiopogon], Tian Men Dong [Asparagus] to supplement yin and clear vacuity heat, Dang Gui [Angelica sinensis] to nourish yin and body fluids, benefit qi and engender blood, Wu Wei Zi [Schizandra], Zhen Zhu Mu [Concha Margaritiferae] and Zhu Sha [Cinnabar] to strongly calm the spirit, clear liver heat and subdue liver yang, Suan Zao Ren [Zizyphus], He Huan Pi [Albizzia] to nourish the heart and calm the spirit.
- Liver depression qi stagnation, blood stagnation. Formula: *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang* [Bupleurum & Cyperus Combination] and *Tao Hong Si Wu Tang* [Persica, Carthamus & Dang Gui Combination] with additions. *Tao*

Hong Si Wu Tang consists of *Si Wu Tang* [Dang Gui Four Combination] plus Tao Ren [Persica] and Hong Hua [Carthamus]. Additions are Bai He [Lily] and Bai Zi Ren [Biota] to nourish the heart, calm the spirit and improve sleep.

Although Flaws and Sionneau provide a different pattern differentiation² in their book 'The Treatment of Modern Western Medical Diseases with Chinese Medicine' (Blue Poppy Press), they agree that liver spleen disharmony is the core pattern of FMS, although rarely the only disease mechanism. The authors also note that 'damp heat complicates most if not all cases of FMS',³ and that in the treatment of FMS 'primary attention should be given to insomnia. Much of the body pain tends to disappear on its own if the patient's sleep can be improved.'³

Spirit calming medicinals often added to base formulas to treat insomnia are:

- Mu Li [Oyster Shell]: Calms the spirit, boosts yin and subdues yang, but also transforms phlegm and is also used to soften hardness and dissipate binds.
- Long Gu [Dragon Bone]: Calms the spirit. Calms the liver and subdues yang.
- Suan Zao Ren [Zizyphus]: Calms the spirit. Supplements heart and liver blood, constrains sweat.
- Bai Zi Ren [Biota]: Calms the spirit. Supplements heart qi, nourishes heart blood. Also moistens the intestines.
- Ye Jiao Teng [Polygonum Stem]: Calms the spirit. Regulates yin and yang of the body and is suitable for liver-kidney yin deficiency with exuberant yang. Also dispels wind and frees the network vessels, and is used in impediment pain.
- Yuan Zhi [Polygala]: Calms the spirit, promotes heart-kidney interaction. Also dispels phlegm and opens the orifices.

Clinical Studies on (Jia Wei) Xiao Yao San in the treatment of Fibromyalgia

In a recent study, *Xiao Yao San Jia Jian* [Bupleurum & Dang Gui Formula Modified] was used in 56 cases of fibromyalgia to observe the clinical therapeutic effect of the treatment strategy 'soothe the liver and strengthen the spleen' on fibromyalgia. Subjects were divided into group A (primary, FMS n=38) and group B (complicated by rheumatism, n=18) and treated with modified *Xiao Yao San* for 12 weeks.⁴

Formula (all quantities referring to raw herbs): Dang Gui [Angelica sinensis] 10 g, Bai Shao [Peony] 20 g, Chai Hu [Bupleurum] 10 g, Gan Cao [Licorice] 10 g, Fu Ling [Hoelen] 15 g, Bai Zhu [Atractylodes, white] 10 g, Huang Qi [Atractylodes] 20 g, Gui Zhi [Cinnamon twigs] 10g, Xiang Fu [Cyperus] 10g, Chuan Shan Jia [sq manthis pentadactylis] 10 g.



Additional modifications:

Red tongue and strong vexation and agitation: Mu Dan Pi [Moutan] 10g, Huang Qin [Scute] 10 g.

Insomnia, palpitations and dream disturbed sleep: Suan Zao Ren [Zizyphus] 15 g, Ye Jiao Teng [Polygonum stem] 15 g.

Result: The effective rate was 92.11% in group A and 72.22% in group B (pain, pressing pain, rigidity, fatigue and insomnia improved significantly).

In another trial, *Jia Wei Xiao Yao San* [Bupleurum & Peony Formula] with modifications was used in 27 cases of fibromyalgia.⁵

Formula (all quantities referring to raw herbs): Dang Gui [Angelica sinensis] 10 g, Bai Shao [Peony] 10 g, Bo He [Mentha] 9 g, Chai Hu [Bupleurum] 10 g, Sheng Jiang [Ginger] 5 slices, Gan Cao [Licorice] 10 g, Fu Ling [Hoelen] 15 g, Bai Zhu [Atractylodes] 10 g, Shan Zhi Zi [Gardenia] 10 g, Mu Dan Pi [Moutan] 10 g. Added Xiang Fu [Cyperus] 10 g, Chuan Xiong [Cyperus] 10 g.

Additional modifications:

Scurrying pain throughout the body (wandering pain, due to either qi stagnation or wind evil): Qiang Huo [Notopterygium], Fang Feng [Siler], Qin Jiao [Gentiana macroph].

Symptoms of dampness: Yi Yi Ren [Coix], Cang Zhu [Atractylodes].

Result: Out of 27 cases, 16 were cured (59.3%), 6 experienced a significant improvement (22.2%), 3 improved (11.1%) and 2 experienced no result (7.4%).

Case Studies⁶

Liver depression and spleen vacuity

Mrs Sun, 39 years old. Symptoms: Since three years she experiences breast, rib-side and stomach duct oppression and pain that repeatedly changes location. This is accompanied by muscle and joint pain at multiple locations over the whole body, all of which repeatedly change location. The above symptoms are aggravated by emotional stress. Abdominal pain and diarrhoea upon consumption of even small quantities of greasy food. The patient is easily angered, rash and impatient. She was diagnosed with FMS and given painkillers that worked at first, but then the condition worsened again and she sought TCM treatment. At the first appointment she also complained of insomnia and profuse dreaming, diarrhoea, a string-like and slippery pulse, a red tongue with teeth marks and a thin greasy coating.

TCM diagnosis: Liver depression and qi vacuity.

Treatment strategy: Course the liver, strengthen the spleen and harmonise the stomach.

Formula (all quantities referring to raw herbs): Chai Hu [Bupleurum] 10 g, Bai Shao [White Peony] 15 g, Zhi Gan Cao [baked Licorice] 5 g, Fu Ling [Hoelen] 15 g, Bai Zhu [Atractylodes, white] 10 g, Zhi Ke [Citrus, ripe] 6 g, Bai Bian Dou [Dolichos Seed] 15 g, Xiang Fu [Cyperus] 10 g, Fo Shou Pian [Citrii Sarcodactylis] 6 g, Yi Yi Ren [Coix] 30 g, Tai Zi Shen [Radix Pseudostellariae] 15 g, Mei Gui Hua [Flos Rosae Rugosae] 3 g, Lü Mei Hua [Prunus mume] 10 g, Bai Ji Li [Tribulus] 15 g, Jiang Can [Silkworm] 10 g, Si Gua Luo [Luffa] 15 g, Fu Xiao Mai [Wheat] 30 g.

After seven doses her diarrhoea and sleep had improved. Shan Yao [Dioscorea] 30 g and Tai Zi Shen [Radix Pseudostellariae] 40 g were added to above prescription and the patient advised to take another 21 doses, after which she reported that the pain had almost completely gone, and that her spirits, appetite and sleep were normal. She was asked to take the prescription for another month to stabilise the result, after which all symptoms had gone. At a check-up six months later she was feeling well and her condition had not relapsed.

Enduring liver qi depression damaging yin, liver kidney yin deficiency

Mrs Ye, 50 years old. Symptoms: For six years she has had muscle pain all over the body, for the last two years this pain became severe and was accompanied by insomnia. Other symptoms: Dizziness and flowery vision, tinnitus, forgetfulness, pain and weakness of the lumbar area and knees, lack of strength, irritability, heat in the palms and soles, dry throat, night sweats, constipation, normal appetite, red tongue with little coating, thin rapid pulse. History of diabetes and hypertension.

TCM diagnosis: Liver-kidney yin vacuity.

Treatment strategy: Supplement liver and kidney yin, harmonise the liver.

Formula (all quantities referring to raw herbs): Tian Ma [Rhizoma Gastrodiae] 6 g, Gou Qi Zi [Lycium fruit] 30 g, Gou Teng [Gambir] 15 g, Bai Shao [White Peony] 15 g, Zhi Gan Cao [baked licorice] 5 g, Shi Hu [herba dendrobii] 15 g, Huang Lian [Coptis] 3 g, Suan Zao Ren [Zizyphus] 30 g, Sha Shen [Glehnia] 30 g, Mai Dong [Ophiopogon] 10 g, Jiang Can [Silkworm] 10 g, Si Gua Luo [Luffa] 15 g, Ye Jiao Teng [Polygonum Stem] 30 g, Fu Xiao Mai [Wheat] 30 g, Tai Zi Shen [Radix Pseudostellariae] 30 g, Fo Shou Pian [Citrii Sarcodactylis] 6 g, Lü Mei Hua [Prunus mume] 10 g.

After taking this prescription for one month, the muscle pain was significantly

reduced. The patient continued taking the prescription unaltered for another two months, after which all her symptoms had disappeared.

Liver depression qi stagnation, blood stagnation

Mrs Chen, 32 years old. Symptoms: Distending pain in the hypochondrium, breasts and abdomen. Pain and numbness in the neck, back and extremities, including muscles and joints. After several tests she is diagnosed with FMS. Despite Western Medicine treatment, the symptoms get worse and she now also suffers from depression, at which point she seeks help in the TCM department.

Additional symptoms: Prolonged menstrual cycle, scanty flow, dysmenorrhoea. Constipation, insomnia, string-like pulse, thin coating.

TCM diagnosis: Bi syndrome, liver depression qi stagnation, impaired flow of qi and blood.

Treatment strategy: Course the liver and resolve depression, rectify qi and alleviate pain, harmonise the stomach.

Formula (all quantities referring to raw herbs): Chai Hu [Bupleurum] 10 g, Bai Shao [White Peony] 15 g, Zhi Gan Cao [baked licorice] 5 g, Xiang Fu [Cyperus] 10 g, Fo Shou Pian [Citrii Sarcodactylis] 6 g, Bai Ji Li [Tribulus] 15 g, Jiang Can

[Bombyx Batryticatus] 10 g, Si Gua Luo [Luffae Fructus Retinervus] 15 g, Yan Hu Suo [Corydalis] 10 g, Fu Xiao Mai [Wheat] 30 g, Mei Gui Hua [Flos Rosae Rugosae] 3 g, Lü Mei Hua [Armeniaca mume] 10 g, Dan Shen [Salvia] 15 g, Tai Zi Shen [Radix Pseudostellariae] 15 g, Ju Luo [Tangerine Peel] 5 g.

She takes 14 doses of this decoction, after which her abdominal, chest and rib-side pain is alleviated, and her joint and muscle pain is slightly alleviated. She is still constipated and her sleep is dream-disturbed. Bai Zi Ren [Biota] 15 g and Ye Jiao Teng [Polygonum stem] 30 g are added to the above prescription and she takes it for one month, after which her pain is almost gone, and her sleep and stool are normal. Her period is now pain-free. She is then put on ready-made *Xiao Yao Wan* [Bupleurum & Dang Gui Formula] to stabilise the result. At a follow-up consultation after six months she is still healthy with no relapses.

Conclusion

The above clinical studies and case studies are good examples of how a base formula may be modified in the treatment of FMS. The high flexibility of TCM theory and its ability to deal with disorders and symptom pictures without clinical precedent make it suitable to treat the varied symptom picture of FMS with good results and without side-effects.

References available on request.