

# HCV / HIV COINFECTION

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## SECTION

## 3

## ALTERNATIVE EASTERN TREATMENT OPTIONS

### Traditional Chinese Medicine for HCV/HIV Coinfection

Many people with the *hepatitis C virus (HCV)* and/or the *human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)* are turning to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for treatment. TCM has a long history in the treatment of *chronic hepatitis*. *Hepatitis B* and *C* infections are prevalent throughout China, accounting for the increased risk of *liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma)* in the Chinese population. The Chinese medical system has been dedicated to solving these problems for many years. The Chinese are working to eliminate sources of hepatitis, and to develop treatments for chronic viral hepatitis using both TCM and western medicine.

At the International Symposium on Viral Hepatitis and AIDS held in Beijing, China in April 1991, more than 100 papers on viral hepatitis were presented. Several of these papers documented the positive results of studies involving Chinese herbal medicine. Studies on the use of herbal *antivirals*, and blood cooling and circulating herbs for liver damage repair were presented. These studies corroborated hundreds of years of treatment experience with Chinese herbs for the *symptoms* of hepatitis.<sup>1,2,3</sup> A 1995 literature review revealed there are at least 55 herbal formulas that can be used to treat hepatitis.<sup>4</sup> Some recent herbal studies from China and Australia showed positive results in chronic hepatitis C using herbal formulas similar to those widely used in the United States.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

In the United States, TCM is a popular *complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)* therapy among people with HIV/AIDS and chronic liver diseases. *Anecdotal* reports from one of the largest western medicine hepatology practices in San Francisco suggest that at least 20% to 30% of patients report use of TCM herbs for hepatitis.<sup>8</sup> The rate of use of TCM therapies by HIV positive people is believed to be around 40%.<sup>9</sup> The actual use of TCM may be underestimated because people often choose not to divulge the use of CAM therapies to their western healthcare providers.

TCM uses a variety of healing modalities. *Protocols* have been developed that have successfully helped people infected with HCV and HIV decrease symptoms, normalize or lower *liver enzymes*, and slow the progression of liver disease. A 1995 pilot study conducted among people coinfecting with HIV and viral hepatitis (B and C) at the San Francisco's Quan Yin Healing Arts Center indicated acupuncture alone may have an effect in lowering and/or normalizing liver enzymes.<sup>10</sup>

### Chinese Medicine Philosophy

The primary goals of TCM are to create wholeness and harmony within a person thereby allowing the mind/body/spirit to self-heal.

Chinese philosophy states there are two opposing principles of life, yin and yang. Imbalances between yin and yang within a person can manifest as illness because the body is considered a microcosm of the world.

TCM defines the *physiological* components of illness using the concepts of *qi* (vital energy), *xue* (blood), *jin-ye* (body fluids), *jing* (essence), *shen* (spirit), and organ systems. Organ systems are domains within the body that govern particular body tissues, emotional states, and activities.

TCM theory states the key to health is the internal ability of the body to remain strong. According to this theory, people are born with a certain amount of original qi (pronounced “chee”). The qi is easily depleted as energy is used by the body and not replaced. It is difficult to increase the original qi. A person must work hard during life just to retain it. Exercise such as *tai chi* and *qi gong*, healthy eating, and good sleep habits are highly recommended for maintaining the original qi. If a person consistently lacks sleep, does not have a healthy diet, abuses drugs or *alcohol*, and/or has excessive or unsafe sex, he or she becomes qi deficient. When weakened and qi deficient, a person is more susceptible to infection by harmful external elements.<sup>11</sup>

### **Traditional Chinese Medicine Therapy for HCV/HIV Coinfection**

In western medicine, extremely harmful external elements include severe bacterial or viral infections such as HCV and HIV. However, those terms are not used historically in TCM. Instead, Chinese medicine “...recognizes the existence of Pestilences called li qi or yi qi. These are diseases that are not caused by the climatic factors of Heat, Cold, Wind, Dampness, or Summer Heat dryness, but by external infectious agents ... that are severely *toxic* because they strike directly at the interior of the body.”<sup>12</sup>

In the case of HIV and/or HCV, the particular pestilence is identified as toxic heat. Toxic heat is considered by TCM to be both an epidemic factor (something that is seen in a number of patients) and its own individual, treatable syndrome. However, HCV and HIV are not identical invasions of toxic heat. They are each characterized by a different set of syndromes involving toxic heat.

### **Chinese Herbal Medicine for HCV/HIV Coinfection**

TCM treatment for HCV/HIV coinfection depends on the *stage* of the disease and the syndromes involved. Herbal medications in conjunction with rest and dietary recommendations can treat the symptoms of *acute hepatitis* fairly rapidly. Chronic hepatitis C is more difficult to treat.

Research and experience both from China and from TCM clinics in the United States suggest that a one-year course of TCM therapy is the minimum needed to alter the progression of hepatitis C. In our clinics, TCM therapy for chronic hepatitis C usually includes combinations of herbal preparations, which are often specifically designed for the disturbed organ system patterns. For example, the combination of Enhance® and Clear Heat® herbal formulas were developed for the treatment of HIV and other chronic viral disease. These formulas were tested in an herbal study at San Francisco General Hospital. Hepatoplex One®, Hepatoplex Two®, and other herbal formulas have been designed specifically for the treatment of chronic hepatitis and related problems

A few Chinese medicine practitioners in the U.S. have developed specific treatments for HCV and HIV infections. Two such practitioners are Dr. Subhuti Dharmananda of Portland, OR and Dr. Qing-Cai Zhang of New York, NY. (See *Chapter 11.2, Modern Chinese Medicine Therapeutics for Hepatitis C* for additional information on Dr. Zhang’s protocol.) My own experience treating people with HIV and/or HCV led me to develop the following herbal formulas. The formulas shown in Table 1 can be recommended and prescribed by licensed TCM practitioners who have been trained through the Quan Yin Healing Arts Center’s Hepatitis C Professional Training Program.

**Table 1. Examples of Chinese Herbal Formulas Used for HIV and/or HCV at Chicken Soup Chinese Medicine and Quan Yin Healing Arts Center, San Francisco, CA**

INDICATION	HERBAL FORMULAS
Acute Hepatitis C	Coptis Purge Fire® Clear Heat® Hepatoplex One® Ecliptex®
Chronic Hepatitis C	Hepatoplex One® Hepatoplex Two® Ecliptex®
Immune Disorders	Cordyseng® Enhance® Tremella American Ginseng®
Toxic Heat Related to Chronic Viral <i>Inflammation</i>	Clear Heat®
Digestive Problems	Quiet Digestion®
Gallstones or Gallbladder Inflammation	GB6®
Liver Inflammation and Chronic Hepatitis	Milk Thistle 80® Silymarin (Karuna)
Qi Stagnation with Xue Deficiency	Woman's Balance®
Other	Milk Thistle 80® Silymarin (Karuna)

Hepatoplex One® is used for acute and chronic hepatitis symptoms. It may be used when liver enzymes are elevated. It can be used with Clear Heat® to increase the Clear Heat® toxin effect. It is designed to regulate qi, vitalize xue, clear heat, and clean toxin.

While there are herbs to help protect the digestion in Hepatoplex One®, this formula is usually used in conjunction with formulas that protect the spleen and stomach, as there are a number of herbs that are cooling or cold and vitalize xue. For example, to increase the effects of tonifying qi and yin, this formula can be taken with Cordyseng®. If there is spleen dampness and deficiency with loose stools, add Shen Ling®. If there is liver invading spleen, a common scenario in chronic hepatitis patients, you may add Shu Gan®.

To protect the yin in liver disease and specifically in chronic hepatitis, you may use Ecliptex®. For immunodeficiency disorders, you may add Enhance® or Tremella American Ginseng®.

For xue stagnation including liver *fibrosis*, *cirrhosis*, and decreased blood circulation, add Hepatoplex Two®.

For xue deficiency and xue stagnation, or to protect the bone marrow during interferon plus *ribavirin* treatment, add Marrow Plus®.

Hepatoplex Two® is designed to vitalize xue. When used in chronic hepatitis, it should be used in conjunction with other herbal formulas. Its special uses are for liver fibrosis and cirrhosis, and to decrease the size of an enlarged liver. It may also have an effect on splenomegaly (an enlarged spleen). As Hepatoplex Two® is a formula designed to vitalize xue, it should increase circulation of the blood and improve *microcirculation* in the capillaries.

Cordyseng® is used as an adjunct to other herbal formulas to increase the function of qi tonification and increase energy. The formula tonifies both yin and yang. It primarily strengthens the spleen, stomach, kidney, and lung, and helps digestion. It is especially good for the chronic *fatigue* found in chronic hepatitis and AIDS.

## Acupuncture Therapies

TCM uses acupuncture extensively in the treatment of chronic hepatitis. Though some of the herbal theories already discussed may apply to acupuncture, the primary goal of acupuncture treatment is to readjust the body's qi in order to enable the body to heal itself. Therefore, acupuncture treatment can be used to treat both specific symptoms and a general epidemic pattern.

After a TCM diagnosis is given for a patient infected with HCV and HIV, an acupuncture treatment plan is developed by considering the epidemic nature of the disease, the individual's complaints, and any underlying constitutional TCM patterns of illness. On a symptomatic level, acupuncture treatments for HCV and HIV infections address digestive functions, appetite, energy level, stress, anxiety, *depression*, pain, and skin complications. Acupuncture has also been used to lower elevated liver enzymes as part of a chronic hepatitis protocol using special acupuncture points.

## Moxibustion

An important part of TCM treatment in HCV/HIV coinfection is the use of *moxibustion*. Moxibustion is the burning of the herb mugwort (called moxa in Chinese) over certain points or areas of the body that correspond to acupuncture points. Moxibustion is often used for pain syndromes and areas that appear or feel cold on the body. It is often prescribed for home use in treating both HCV and HIV infections.

## Qi Gong

Qi gong *meditation* and exercise is a common practice in China. It is growing in popularity in the United States among people who have HIV and other life-threatening illnesses such as cancer. Many studies from China, Japan, Germany, and the United States show the positive effects of qi gong on immune function. Many locations around the United States offer medical qi gong classes specifically designed for people infected with HCV and HIV.

## Dietary Therapy

A healthy diet is considered a key part of maintaining qi and harmony in the body. Most TCM practitioners recommend that their HIV-infected clients eat a cooked, warm diet. Other recommendations are based on the specific organ pattern diagnosis. For example, those suffering from chronic diarrhea may be advised to eat white rice (not brown rice) daily, especially in the form of an easy-to-make rice porridge called congee or jook.

## Combining Eastern and Western Therapies

If you decide to use a combination of eastern and western therapies, you must discuss all of your treatment approaches with both your eastern and western practitioners. The use of some herbal therapies in conjunction with *interferon-based therapy* may be inappropriate. However, in my experience, Chinese medicine can be highly effective for the management of side effects from drug therapy. TCM is used as an alternative to western drug therapy in some cases. A list of herbs and drugs that are considered toxic to the liver (*hepatotoxic*) can be found in *Appendix IV*.

## Summary

Many people with HCV/HIV coinfection are using TCM as either complementary or alternative treatment. TCM uses a number of therapies for coinfection including acupuncture, moxibustion, Chinese herbs, qi gong, and dietary therapy. While these therapies have not undergone *clinical trials* in the west, many of them have been used for centuries in China for hepatitis and other conditions. The results of modern Chinese research on herbs and other modalities are used in the development of current Chinese medicine treatments for HCV/HIV coinfection.

It is important to discuss all treatment approaches with both your eastern and western practitioners in order to ensure the safety of and to gain the greatest benefit from all of your treatment modalities. For recommended reading on traditional Chinese medicine, please see the *Resource Directory*.

## References

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