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Changes in the early summer weather often cause arthritis to worsen:

The Chinese view of Arthritis

Arthritis, either rheumatoid or osteo, falls under the Bi Syndrome in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Bi Syndrome disease results from external conditions – wind, cold, damp, or heat. These conditions obstruct the meridians or lines of energy in the body so that the energy, called qi or ch'i cannot circulate. Once the qi is blocked, the patient experiences soreness, numbness, or heaviness of the muscles, tendons, and joints, or swelling and a burning sensation of the joints. Bi Syndrome may include rheumatic disease, rheumatoid arthritis, fibrositis, gout, and neuralgia.

When the syndrome becomes chronic, the result is one of the following pathogenic changes:

1. Circulation of qi and blood is blocked. Blood stasis (pooling) results in the meridians. It manifests as purplish skin spots, nodes around the joints, a swelling of the joints, and impaired movement.
2. The qi energy which naturally fights pathogens is consumed by the disease and the patient winds up with both blood and qi deficiencies to varying degrees.
3. The patient continues to be exposed to the external causes of his disease and the damage now begins to extend to the internal organs. This stage of Bi Syndrome is very difficult to treat.

Beyond this point, TCM branches out into a complicated array of various symptoms and specific treatments:

1. With Bi affected by cold and damp, there is Wandering Bi (sores and pain in the joints; pain moving from one area of the body to another; impaired movement; aversion to cold; thin white coating on the tongue; and a superficial pulse: Painful Bi (intense and fixed pain, alleviated by heat and aggravated by cold; impaired movement without redness of local skin or heat; a thin, white coating on the tongue, and wiry, tense pulse: Fixed Bi (pain and heaviness of the joints or swelling of the joints with fixed pain, impaired movement, numbness of the skin, a

white sticky tongue coating, and an even, slow pulse. The obvious treatment principle with this Bi is to clear the meridians so qi can circulate and to disperse the cold.

2. With Bi affected by wind, dampness, and heat there is pain, redness, swelling and a burning sensation of the joints, alleviated by cold and tender to the touch; it is accompanied by fever, aversion to the heat, thirst, irritability, a yellow, dry tongue coating, and a rolling, rapid pulse.
3. Obstruction of the meridians with blood stasis: here the patient's condition is much worse because the syndrome has become chronic. Now there is fixed pain in the joints, being more severe at night; swelling and deformity of the joints, impaired movement, dark purplish skin which is tender to the touch, nodules below the skin, dark complexion, dark red lips and tongue or with purplish spots, a white or thick sticky tongue coating, and a thready uneven pulse.
4. Chronic arthritis due to constant attack from outside. Pain, swelling and deformity of joints, impaired movement, difficulty walking, atrophy of tendons and muscles, emaciated limbs, pallor, lassitude or listlessness accompanied by fever, night sweats, dizziness and blurring of vision, dry mouth, thirst, a red tongue with a little coating or without coating, and a thready, rapid pulse.
5. The acidity of the body fluids will cause arthritis to develop. Therefore, dietary approaches are very important.
6. Osteoarthritis is common to every human being with the aging process. Acupuncture treatments to regulate the proper flow of qi and blood will retard the process.
7. Arthritis commonly results from sports injury. It can be prevented with the use of acupuncture and herbal treatment.

ACUPUNCTURE:

For each of the symptoms given above, there are specific acupuncture points to relieve the condition. That is why the acupuncturist will take a very detailed look at a patient to determine where the patient "fits" in the syndrome. An ordinary course of acupuncture treatments is from three to six, however, once a condition has become chronic, it may take many more. Finally, when the patient's condition has been "righted", s/he may have to return for treatments from time to time.

HERBS AND SUPPLEMENTS

There is a huge TCM pharmacopeia devoted to Bi Syndrome with many variations so that the practitioner can choose exactly the right one. A typical Chinese herbal formula, such as Feng Shi Xiao Tong Wang, contains Mei yao (*Resina commiphorae*), Di-feng-pi (*Cortex illicii*), Mu-gua (*Fructus chaenomelis*), Fang-feng (*Radix saposhnikoviae*), Ma-huang (*Herba ephedrae*), Qian nian jian

(*Rhizoma homalomenae*), Gui zhi (*Ramulus cinnamom*), Gan Cao (*Radix glycyrrhizae*), Qiang huo (*Rhizoma et radix notopterygii*), Ru xiang (*Resina boswelliae*), Niu xe (*Radix achyranthis bidentatae*), Du zhong (*Cortex eucommiae*), Du huo (*Radix angelicae pubescentis*).

In addition, there are non-TCM herbs and supplements which are of immense help.

Aniseed Myrtle (*Backhousia anisata*) which contains antipathogenic compounds that counteract the build up of toxins in the joints and therefore also reduce pain.

Glucosamine Sulfate works by building the proteins that make up healthy cartilage. These proteins bind to water, which is critical for joint lubrication. It provides a constant supply of the nutrients need to repair and build protein. Chondroitin sulfate should be used in addition.

Mountain Pepper (*Tasmania lanceolata*) has an anti-inflammatory effect.

Lemon Myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*) is the source of citral oil which is an Antipathogenic for the joints.

Wild Rosella (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) helps reduce joint pain by neutralizing toxins.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*): this is the yellow spice used in Indian curry. It is drawn to and consumes nitric oxide, the main toxin in the joints.

DIET

Many patients with Bi Syndrome find their problems eased by avoiding foods in the Nightshade Family: eggplant, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers. Others find that cutting down on meat protein helps. The only way to find out, is to try.

Indian Curries, in addition to standardized Turmeric, would seem to be an obvious good thing.

EXERCISE

Very few Bi syndrome patients wish to hear this one, but it is crucial, as your condition improves. The human body was created to move, not to sit. The more you sit, the more your joints (and your internal organs) deteriorate.

TEMPERATURE

It is very important for arthritis patients to avoid cold drinks and cold food. Coldness affects qi and blood flow, especially in severe and chronic cases. Exposure to the cold, wind, and dampness is a big factor in the progress of the disease. Thus in TCM, arthritis is called "Wind-and-Damp Disorder."