

Back when I was in TCM school, my teachers used to say there are no wrong treatments in Chinese medicine, only the wrong diagnosis. The key to having a successful outcome for all our patients starts with the diagnosis, and that's probably the hardest part in Chinese medicine.

Today I'm diving deep into the heart of Chinese medicine diagnosis, breaking down the complexity into a practical nine-step framework that you can apply with each of your patients and get great results.

Whether you are a practitioner still trying to refine your skills or TCM students who still baffled by diagnosis like I was when I was in school, this framework is a game changer and I can't wait to go through each of the steps with you today.

Welcome to Acupuncture, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture because after all, acupuncture rocks!

So let's start with the basics. Always start with the Yin Yang theory. This is the basics, right? And we're looking at the eight principles. The eight principles are Yin and Yang, hot and cold, internal, external deficiency, and excess.

You start with those. So let's start first with internal versus external. Internal is going to affect all the organs, the brain, and the reproductive system, while external is going to affect the musculoskeletal system, like the bones, the muscles, the joints, the ligaments, the tendons, and the skin.

That's more external. So if someone comes in with carpal tunnel syndrome, that's more external even though it could be a chronic issue or someone comes in with Menstruation pain like dysmenorrhea. That's an internal. Okay, so you decide what the chief complaint is about because you want to address first the chief complaint.

Of course, all the other symptoms are going to make a picture and put the puzzle together. But first, we want to know what this person has come for, right? If they come for insomnia, insomnia is usually an internal problem. If they came because they have sciatica, that's usually external.

Once we decide if it's internal versus external, we're going to look at, is it more cold, more hot, meaning can it come from yang deficiency, which that's why the person is always cold or is this excess yin, which means the person is cold, but in one area it's localized.

So is it that the person is cold all the time all over the body and they like warm food, warm drinks, and they like to be warm. Or is it that they are cold in one area, like with Raynaud's disease, which is yin excess, or excess cold. Versus the first one is yang deficiency. Make sense? Or, it is excess yang, or yin deficiency, meaning it's the hot person, right?

So yang excess would have big symptoms. Red face, anger, insomnia where the person doesn't sleep at all, all night. There's a red tongue with yellow coat. While yin deficiency is going to be more irritability, toss and turn all night, red cheeks, and no coat on the tongue.

So we differentiate those two and then we decide is this more of heat or cold depending if it's excess or deficiency. So the eight principles we're going to look at. Deficiency and excess, which we have decided if it's cold or hot deficiency or excess. And the problem is internal or external. Once you've got this, you have a little bit of a better idea.

This is your first step of that frame work.

Second step. Now that we know that let's say it's insomnia, it's an internal problem, and the person is always on a hot side and it's excess yang or excess heat. Let's look at why the five element theory is the key to figure out where it all started.

So when we look at the five elements, if you look at someone that comes and sees you for low immune system, they are saying, I'm always sick, I get colds and flus, and it takes me weeks to recover. That's an immune system or a wei qi, a defensive qi, that is not strong enough to fight pathogens. So in this instance, we know that it is the metal, Lung and large intestine, element that is affected.

Now, what is the root cause? Now we can look back and with all our inquiry, we realize that this person's diet is not feeding or generating a good immune system. They don't have a proper nutritious diet. So that's Earth, the digestive system, spleen and stomach, not generating a good immune system.

So when we treat, we want to treat The immune system, but we also want to treat the digestive system. So now we have two things to look at. But why is this person not eating properly? Maybe it's because they're really stressed. So stress affects liver and gallbladder, which is the wood element. The wood, in the five element theory, over controls spleen and stomach, creating some issue with spleen and stomach.

And in turn, spleen and stomach, or earth, cannot generate a good immune system. So now we have to treat the liver, gallbladder, or the stress. We have to treat the digestive system, and we have to treat the immune system. The five element always tells you Where it all started. So now you have clues of what to look for in the next key frame from that ninth step.

So the next step is to look at the four vital substances. vital substances. Qi, blood, body fluid, and essence. Now it's very easy to start with essence. I'm going to go backward. But essence is either we are deficient. And you know that the deficiency sign when it comes to essence is really going to be low libido, having reproductive system issues, having gray hair early in life, not straight teeth, bone issues, anything that's related to essence, aging faster is going to be your essence deficiency.

That's an easy one. Either there is or there isn't. Now body fluid can either be excess or deficient. Excess is too much dampness and deficiency leads to dryness. Easy. So if you see mucus and a lot of excess body fluid, it's excess dampness. If you see a lot of dryness, it's dryness, it's body fluid deficiency.

Super easy. Maybe there's a balance between dampness and dryness and you don't see anything. That's great. The next one is blood. Blood can be deficient. It can have heat or it can be stagnated. So that's easy. Now, what happens when it's deficient? Pale and poor. Pale face, pale lips, pale tongue, poor sleep, poor energy, poor memory, poor vision.

You decide, is blood being affected and is blood deficient? Now the next one is blood stasis. Blood stasis is pain and purple. Is your purple tongue, purple nails, purple lips and is a local fixed pain like dysmenorrhea or sciatica or an ankle sprain if it was acute.

Blood heat, on the other hand, means that there's going to be abnormal bleeding with heat sign. So abnormal bleeding may be rectal bleeding, blood in the urine, uh, heavy, heavy flooding menstruation, nosebleeds, that is associated with heat. With feeling hot, red tongue, rapid pulse, irritability, that shows you blood heat.

The last one is Qi, and Qi can be deficient. It can be stagnated. It can be rebelling, meaning going the wrong way or the opposite way that she is supposed to be.

Or, it could be sinking. Now, sinking is always spleen Qi sinking, so that's easy. And that's usually prolapse or extreme fatigue. Qi rebelling affects the lung, the stomach, and the liver. So, stomach means acid reflux, heartburn, nausea, and vomiting. That is all stomach rebelling. Lung rebelling is coughing and liver rebelling is actually liver yang rising which means it's like the volcano effect and we have irritability, anger, maybe red eyes, high blood pressure, headaches that is worse at the end of the day and with stress but feels better with a hot compress.

Qi stagnation shows with irritability, sighing all the time, moody for women, a lot of PMS, specifically breast tenderness, bloating, constipation, and cold hands as well.

That's also a Qi stagnation, that's not reaching the extremities.

Qi deficiency is fatigue, weak, a pale tongue, and a weak pulse. Now, depending which organs it's affecting, there's more symptoms to it. And that leads me to the next step in our framework, which is the Zongfu organs.

With the Zongfu organs, we are going to refine the diagnosis. Earlier when we talked about qi stagnation, we know it's liver, because liver moves qi. So now, liver is qi stagnation. We refined the qi stagnation to liver. If it was a deficiency of qi, is it spleen?

Is it lung? Is it kidney? Is it heart? Those are the most common ones. So we look at differentiating the symptoms. If it's spleen qi deficiency, there's going to be digestive system issue. If there's lung qi deficiency, immune system issue. If there's kidney chi deficiency, we're going to have usually lower gate incontinence.

So kidney Qi is in charge of opening and closing the lower gates. So usually when there is kidney Qi deficiency, we may have incontinence or getting up at night to pee a lot of times, and we will have dizziness, of course, fatigue, probably knee pain, low back pain. That's going to show up as well. comes to heart deficiency, we're going to see abnormal day sweat and anxiety.

See how easy it is? Right? You refine your diagnosis. If it's blood deficiency, the only three organs that can be blood deficient is heart, spleen, and liver. Because spleen produces blood, liver stores blood, and heart moves blood. So, if there is a blood deficiency, it could be either of those.

So you can refine your diagnosis a little bit more. Can it be more than one? Of course.

Does that make sense? So when it comes to the tongue for organ, we can refine and decide which organ is affected the most according to symptoms, observation, palpation, et cetera. Yes.

The fifth step is figuring out which pathogens are affecting the body. Now, external pathogen invasion is acute, and that can be a common cold, a virus, a bacteria. This is external pathogen invasion. It could be hypothermia, or heat stroke, or sunburn. That is all external pathogen invasion, which means the pathogen comes in, it's acute, and we may have wind heat, wind cold.

We may have damp heat, damp cold. We may have, uh, really, really strong fire. For example, if you have a heat stroke, stroke or sunburn that external pathogen fire invading the body and that creates fever and burn, et cetera, et cetera. So that's more for acute, right? Makes sense.

Most of the time we see people when they come and it's a chronic issue. So let's talk about internal pathogens. Internal pathogens are going to be five, while external there's six, because in external pathogens we also have summer heat, which doesn't occur in chronic. So in chronic internal pathogens, we're going to have options of wind, cold, heat or fire, damp and dryness.

Those are the five. They can be combined, of course. We can have damp cold, damp heat, we can have wind fire, wind cold. All those things can absolutely affect the body. So let's look at examples. When there is internal wind, there's always movement. Remember, wind moves.

It can be tremors, tics, twitches, muscle cramps, spasms, it could be Parkinson's. Anything that's been moving and that's abnormal in the body is internal wind.

Dampness is excess body fluid. Dryness is body fluid deficiency. And then we have cold and hot. And again, we talked about this when we talked about the yin-yang. So you can have internal cold due to deficiency or excess, and internal heat that could be due to excess or deficiency.

So now by the time you get to the pathogens, you know which one are in the body. Can we have more than one? Of course, we can have a lot of them. Okay, you still with me? For number six and seven, we are going to look back into the Yin Yang. When we talked about the Yin Yang, we said it was acute or chronic.

Now, if it's acute, and again in practice, we don't see as many acute issues, but it's really important to discuss because we obviously can treat family and ourselves when it comes to acute problems. Looking at number six and seven is the six stages and four levels.

Those two are big lectures. The six stages and the four levels both come from classics, TCM classics that were written way back when and are the basis of a lot of our medicine. So the six stages come from the Shan Han Lun. And don't quote me on my Mandarin pronunciation because after all, I'm French, speaking English, and trying to teach Chinese medicine.

Pshhh! Mind blown! So, the Shang Han Lun is a really big classic book and it talks about the six. And the school of thought behind this book is cold invasion would start at the top level stage or at the most superficial stage. And slowly, if the body cannot fight, can get deeper and deeper through each stage all the way to the bottom stage where it makes everything worse for the person's health.

So at the top, which is the tai yang stage, which affects the bladder and small intestine, it is the most superficial, so the symptoms are not going to be as bad as when it goes all the way down to the jue-yin stage which affects the liver and pericardium. So this is a big lecture. I'm not going to go into it, but this is a really interesting one. And it's more for acute at this stage, right?

When you see patients, you use this for acute mostly, not that you can't use it for internal and chronic, but I'm not going to go into it now because it's a big lecture.

Like I said, when it comes to the four levels, It comes from the classic Wen Bing Shui, which is the school of thought that everything starts with heat.

It starts at the wei level, the defensive Qi level. Heat penetrates and we have a sore throat. And then it gets deeper into the Qi level and now we have fever.

And it can go to the Ying level, which is the nutritive level, and then goes deeper into blood level where we have hallucination, high fever, and it becomes really more dangerous. So those, again, are acute, and so I'm going to let them be for now.

Now the next key frame is the three jiaos.

I think we're still confused how we use the three jiaos. The upper jiao, the middle jiao and the lower jiao. Each of the jiao contain different organs, the Zang-Fu organ. So the upper jiao is heart and lung. The middle jiao is the digestive system, so spleen and stomach.

Some schools of thought think that liver and gallbladder is upper jiao. It's also part of the middle jiao. Other schools of thought will put liver, gallbladder at the bottom with kidneys, small intestine, large intestine and bladder. So I like to put liver, gallbladder in the middle just because on the tongue, it's on the side.

So it kind of encompasses the middle. That's my school of thought, but you have to follow what you think is right so, if someone comes in with dampness in the spleen and heat in the stomach, right, stomach heat rebelling, so acid reflux, heartburn, bad breath, but at the same time dampness in the spleen, bloating, loose stools, fatigue, fatigue, That is a damp heat in the middle jowl.

You can still treat the dampness in the spleen and the heat in the stomach, but also pick points. So choose points from the sand jowl meridian to really consolidate your treatment. That's how we use the three jowls.

The last step to this framework is the meridians. The meridians, I think sometimes we forget to use those. Remember, we have a lot of meridians, including dermatomes, and dermatomes are all on the skin, they're a part of the meridian on the skin, right?

So if we do have some eczema, or a patient has eczema on the large intestine meridian, now we know the large intestine meridian is affected, and we can go deeper into it and see what else is being affected. Most often, it's going to be the large intestine organ and the long organ because they are paired and they're part of the immune system and the skin.

When you look at meridians, it's really important to know the meridians. For example, the collaterals. The liver collateral starts at liver 5 goes up in the medial aspect of the thigh and wraps up around the external genitalia. So when there is acute external genitalia issue, like a herpes attack, those are a meridian issue, and often it's a liver collateral meridian issue, which means, remember I just said, the liver collateral starts at liver 5, We need to use liver 5 and liver 5 external genitalia issue.

Diagnosis has to be the hardest part of Chinese medicine. We always say there is no wrong treatment in TCM, only the wrong diagnosis. This is why I created my second

book, Chinese Medicine Made Easy, to make it easy to grasp using a lot of colorful visuals. I have included all Chinese medicine foundation, Yin Yang Theory, Five Elements, and Zang-Fu Organ, all of it.

All diagnosis, of course, including tongue and pulse. Practice case studies to help you improve your skills, as well as give you access to my online fillable intake form to use with your own patients. You can download the digital version on any device, and it comes with many video links to complement it.

Or, if like me, you like to read a real book, the hard copy ships on. all over the world. Before you invest in this book, you can download a sample of it to make sure that the format of the book is everything you were looking for, because I want to make sure that you are absolutely benefiting from it.

Listen to what people have to say about my green book, Chinese Medicine Made Easy. The more I read, the more I like this book. It is simple to follow, All information is super organized with great pictures, makes memorizing a lot easier. This book will definitely make my learning a lot more productive. Yay!

So happy to hear that. You've done it again. You are amazing. I wish we had your resources 20 years ago back in TCM school. This also makes my day because this is why I do what I've been doing with Acupro Academy for quite a few years now. To support everyone, check out the links in the show notes below, or go to my website, acuproacademy.com and click the shop tab on the menu bar and get your copy today.

So the nine-step framework starts with the basics, with the Yin Yang. Looks at the five elements to figure out which one started it all. Then goes in to decide which four substances are affected, maybe more than one. And then we refine it with which organ is being affected so we can treat this much more successfully.

And then we look at, are there pathogens? Do we need to get rid of dampness or heat or cold or wind? Then we can look if the upper middle or lower jowls are affected and use more of the sand jowl meridian to help our treatment.

And then we use the meridians specifically when there is a musculoskeletal or skin problem that we could see is affecting certain meridians.

When it comes to the six stages and the four levels and external pathogens, this is more acute.

I truly hope this was useful and you can start using this framework to make the right diagnosis for your patients so then you can come up with the treatment that is the perfect treatment for your patients with a successful outcome.

Have a fantastic day and no matter what, keep rocking it using TCM.

Thank you so much for spending your time with me today. I truly hope you benefited from this episode and I would love for you to share it with a friend that may benefit from it as well. Follow the show, leave a review, and if you want more, Go to my website, acuproacademy.com. I have tons of resources there with treatment protocols, case studies, free courses, and so much more.

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