

When it comes to the liver and TCM perspective, before we talk about TCM diagnosis and differentiating patterns, we just want to remind ourselves of the functions of the TCM liver system because it'll help us with diagnosing, right? So one of the function of TCM is liver is to ensure the smooth flow of qi.

What does that mean? It means to allow your body to be relaxed in any way possible. So I always say stress really affects the liver first because it tightens or stops the flow of qi. That would be the first thing to look for. Then we can talk about the fact that the liver controls sinews, which means tendons, ligaments, joints for better movement.

So if there is issues with any , tightness or things like carpal tunnel syndrome or anything that's affecting joints, ligaments, and tendons on a chronic basis, then we have to look at the liver as well. Liver stores blood for menstruation, so the liver function regarding blood in TCM, it's in charge of storing blood for energy purpose, but also for menstruation.

So that's important too if there is menstruation issue, like , pain, like clots, or, not a lot of blood, like a very light menstruation or very short menstruation, that also can be something that we look at compared to the liver. And then it opens into the eyes and control the tears. So of course, if there is any eyes issues in TCM, we start looking at the liver, the TCM liver first, and then we can look at other organs as well, depending on what's happening, right?

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!

In my observation podcast, the links in the show notes I talk about the eyes themselves and talking about each part of the eye relates to also different organs. For example, the lids, the upper lids are related to spleen. So if they're puffy, that's a spleen dampness or a spleen issue, right? But in general, liver relates to eyes. In general, okay, it manifests on the nails or on the nails color or the nails health.

So if there's brittle nails or different color purple nails or pale then we have to look at what's going on the liver, right? So those are. Little clues that are going to help us differentiating diagnosis. And then one of the things that the liver is very much in charge of , is in charge of planning and vision and goals.

So it's the go getter, the type A personality that's going to be achieving. That's what the liver is in charge of. you know, If there is issues with someone feeling stuck or not being able to see the future or plan or do anything like that, then we look at the liver. Okay? So that's just a reminder of the liver function because that's important for us to look at.

So let's start it up by looking at what question, because this is all about TCM inquiry method, right? The inquiry method is probably the biggest method because we spend, on the first consultation with patients, we spend a lot of time depending who you are and how fast you go with your question and how much the patient wants to share at the beginning.

or they're not thinking this is important, right? Details are super important to TCM. Obviously for us, we know that. So it's important to pass on this to your patients and remind them the more detail, the better for us, right? Relevant details, of course. So one of the thing that is really important is to ask the patients, do you feel stress on the scale of one to 10, 10 being super stressed, where are you?

patients are going to be seven. Seven means they are stressed, but not at the end of the rope. If they're saying eight and nine, then that's not good, right? They're feeling very overwhelmed and very stressed. Stress blocks the flow of Qi. So that creates some liver Qi stagnation with tension in the shoulder and neck.

So that's why one of the question could be, is there any tension in the shoulders, upper shoulder, back, trapezius area, and neck. Also someone that sighs a lot, that's also a liver qi stagnation. So you can probably ask if they do, or you can observe if they do sigh while they're answering your questions. I never say to patients right away, are you angry?

Unless they say I'm angry, because that's a. Big strong word. So I start with saying, what does stress look like for you? How do you react to stress? Do you feel frustrated? Do you become impatient or irritable or short fused or moody? Right? Those are things that we can start asking that are relevant to us, but also that can extract what we need from the patient information in order to make a diagnosis.

For women, if there are PMS, premenstruation syndrome, like breast tenderness, , bloated, constipated, and clumsy, that's definitely a liver qi stagnation. So a lot of women will have more bloating or constipation that happens. Only prior to menstruation, right? Specifically, they'll say, if I'm more stressed, , they're amplified.

Or some months I get those, some months I don't. And that's usually related to the amount of stress that they are under. The clumsiness is very funny, but it's a question I always ask. Do you feel like you're bumping into things or dropping things? And , women will say, Oh my God, yes, I do.

That's a. typical liver qi stagnation when the person is stressed and not paying attention and so they're bumping into things and dropping things because there's too much on their plate. So those are questions we can ask and a liver qi stagnation is probably one of the most common pattern in TCM diagnosis.

I think All patients, all of us have experienced liver qi stagnation at one point or another, right? So basically feeling stress, feeling tense, right? Feeling, rigid, feeling tight, feeling stuck

emotionally, feeling, frustrated or resentful. or having, mood swings, specifically at PMS for women, right?

So if the person cannot make decisions, that's more of a gallbladder issue. But in general, with the liver feels kind of stuck. And depression has many, many, many TCM patterns, options, and possibilities. Absolutely there is liver qi stagnation in depression because the person feels they're stuck in that space and there's no way out, right?

So that is also a liver qi stagnation. I think foods are great because they are medicine, right? But what I think is important too is to do things that are movement, right? Like go for walks, exercise, do yoga, tai chi, anything that's going to move the person is.

Also going to relax them and do things that de stress the person. And of course, acupuncture is one of them, but on their own, there might be things that people need to help de stress. Maybe it is, to read, maybe it is to spend time with friends, whatever it is that that person feels is really fun for them and relaxing, right?

That's definitely one of the most common patterns. So that's an easy pattern to diagnose. The next one that's pretty common too, and I have a lot of patients that come in with liver fire. we'll look at later on the difference between liver qi stagnation, liver yang rising and liver fire, and then I will show you the pattern differentiation.

But at this time, let's just look at liver fire itself. So when there is liver fire, there is fire symptoms. The fire symptoms are going to be the red tongue with redder sides. So that's heat, right? But with a yellow coat. So that's excess heat. If there is on top of it, strawberry prickles. That means the fire is very, very big, meaning it's been there for a long time kind of thing.

So that would be on the tongue. The pulse is rapid because there's fire. It's wiry because it stems from liver qi stagnation. Liver fire comes from liver qi stagnation, right? And basically what happened is the person is so stressed, more and more stress, and eventually it turns into fire. The volcano erupts, I guess.

And so the temporal headaches are going to be worse on stress, because stress does affect the liver. And then at the end of the day, people may get a headache and it'll be on the temple. area because that's the liver gallbladder area for headaches. the fire will look with red eyes and red face.

Of course, the eyes are more liver related, so there's going to be red bloodshot eyes. When there is fire, usually there's bleeding. So the red bloodshot eyes is that bleeding part. The person will be not just frustrated or irritable, they'll be very angry, like rageful, like just losing their temper. If there is tinnitus, it will be high pitched, and it would be coming and going.

So, it won't be there all the time, but when they're more stressed, the tinnitus will show up. Constipation, because the fire is going to dry the bowel movement. Feeling hot, of course, the

person's feeling really hot all the time. That is going to show as well. So, great points for that to bring the fire down would be kidney one, liver two, liver three.

gallbladder 34, gallbladder 43. Those are basic points. Of course, we want to be more, in depth when we see patients. And of course, avoid, any food that is going to really raise the fire. So alcohol, things that are very hot, right? spicy food, rich food, lamb, lamb is one of the hottest meat.

So that also makes it worse. So we want to have more. cooling things like rhubarb, which is quite cold, and dandelion, those are very cold, you don't want to do this long term. But cooling things like cucumbers and spinach and leafy greens, those are great to cool the fire. Okay, one really common pattern in TCM is blood deficiency, specifically liver blood deficiency.

So liver blood deficiency comes in, remember, liver's in charge of storing blood for menstruation, right? That's a big one. So liver blood deficiency, the big symptoms of blood deficiency is always pale and poor. Okay? So pale tongue, pale nails, pale lips, pale face. So the nails would be very pale, probably pale purplish, just because when there is not enough blood, it doesn't move because there's not enough.

So it pools at certain areas. So often with blood deficiency, it can lead to blood stasis as well. So often it might be lavender color, that purplish Pale color, this is very common. And then the poor is poor memory, and that's more short term memory, can't remember where you put your keys or, this person's name that they just told you two minutes ago.

Poor focus, so cannot concentrate at all. Poor sleep, so this poor sleep is being awake between 1 and 3 a. m. and having a hard time falling back asleep. Usually, eventually, the person falls back asleep, but they wake up between 1 and 3 a. m. poor circulation. So the poor circulation is more having numbness, tingling, pins and needles in the extremities.

So maybe people that have carpal tunnel syndrome, at first with carpal tunnel syndrome, a lot of time it's sharp pain, it's blood stasis, but eventually the hand or the wrist becomes very weak and the person cannot open a door handle or open a jar because they don't have the strength. So eventually it's numb, it's tingling at pins and needles, and that's a blood deficiency.

There's not enough blood to circulate in there. And so we have numbness and issues with tingling. Poor night vision. So usually with blood deficiency, there is, liver blood deficiency. Poor night vision, but also blurred vision and floaters or spots that are, floating in front of the eyes.

So those are all basic TCM liver blood deficiency symptoms, pale and poor.

The opposite would be blood stasis. So liver blood stasis, because remember liver. is in charge of moving qi all over the body, right? Qi perspective or function is to move blood. Okay, so liver moves qi and qi moves blood. So if there is liver qi stagnation, liver is not able to move qi.

Eventually, if qi is not moving, it cannot move blood. So blood stasis, ensue, right? So eventually there is liver blood stasis coming from a liver qi stagnation perspective. So blood stasis is P and P. purple and pain. Blood deficiency is P and P, it's pale and poor. Blood stasis is purple and pain. Okay?

So purple and pain. So purple tongue, purple nails, purple lips. And the pain is stabbing, strong, piercing pain that is fixed, meaning it's local. So for a woman with dysmenorrhea or painful menstruation. The pain is local. It's right on the lower abdominal area, and it's not going anywhere. It's just fixed in that area.

Or a fixed migraine or headache that's on one side of the head that's not moving, and it's piercing, piercing headache. Or someone that has an acute problem like someone sprained their ankle, the ankle area is very, very painful, it's stabbing pain in that area, so the blood is pulled in that area, there's blood stagnation or blood stasis, which is the same.

So any pain that's going to be fixed and stabbing with purple tongue. purple nails, anything that's purple. Sometimes it's a bruise that's purple in that area because someone hurt themselves, right? They fell or they had an injury. Then that's blood stasis. Easy? Okay. Let's look at deficiency also of liver.

So liver yin deficiency is very common as well. I'm looking at those patterns because they're a very common clinical practice. Yin deficiency signs or symptoms to remind ourselves are red cheeks, night sweats, Insomnia. So insomnia, that's yin deficiency, it's usually toss and turn all night. So the person doesn't feel that they slept very well or deep because they toss and turn, they wake up and fall back asleep constantly.

Yin deficiency symptoms are thin, rapid pulse. When there's yin deficiency, there's not enough fluid. Eventually, the fluid dries up, because yin deficiency means that your AC is broken. your cooling system is broken. So eventually, there's that heat that comes from deficiency, and it dries the fluid, because there's heat for a long time.

So there's no coat on the tongue. The tongue is red because there's heat, but it comes from deficiency, and it dries everything. So there's no coat. There's a thin, but rapid, because of heat pulse. So that's all. very much a yin deficiency, picture. Also another yin deficiency picture is, irritability.

The liver part is the dizziness. So remember, liver opens into the eyes. And I know dizziness is from the perspective of Western anatomy and physiology, it's related to the ear. But in TCM, it's about symptoms. Dizziness means vision. It's affecting the way you see things.

Things are blurry or you think they're turning and you're going to fall because everything is making you dizzy. So that dizziness feeling is your eyes, vision is changed. So that's the correlation here. So dizziness is more of a liver issue, weak vision, night blindness. So that comes from a blood deficiency.

Often if there's liver blood deficiency, it may eventually lead, not always, to liver yin deficiency, the ear ringing also, the tinnitus can be constant and low pitch menopause. So that's not a symptoms, but for women that have a lot of hot flash, night sweat, irritability, feeling very angry at that stage of their life.

That's often a liver yin deficiency, but also a kidney yin deficiency because kidney is affected because it's an aging process as well and a reproductive system process, right? So kidney is related to reproductive system. So that's where that comes from. depression also can be part from a liver yin deficiency.

Again, Depression comes from liver qi stagnation. And when there is liver yin deficiency, there is usually some liver qi stagnation. This is very common. So the person is irritable, they're tense, they're stressed usually. Again, Liver qi stagnation can stem or can be catalyst for all the other liver patterns quite often.

Oh, that stress affecting the liver qi. Yikes! It's affecting all of us. So we want to avoid things that are creating heat like alcohol and spicy food.

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 foundations, Yin Yang Theory, Five Elements, Zong 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.

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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](http://acuproacademy.com).

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So let's look at comparing the pattern. So basically pattern differentiation. So I said liver qi stagnation is the catalyst. It's the first, right? It's when you get stressed.

If you get more stress, you can get to liver yang rising and then more and more, more stress, then you'll get liver fire, right? That's very common combination that starts at one becomes two and becomes three. Now let's talk about liver qi We obviously have seen all the symptoms, it's the same.

One of the symptoms I didn't mention earlier is rib pain. So rib pain means it feels almost like a stitch on the muscle between the ribs and it can come and go and it can move, it's not always at the same spot. That's hypochondriac pain. There's nothing wrong physically, but it shows you that you're stressed, right?

So that's also something that can come up. Now, often with liver qi stagnation, symptoms will be nausea or acid reflux or belching a lot or feeling of a lump in the throat. So that's more symptoms of liver qi stagnation that affects the stomach. This is more when The liver over controls the stomach, so wood over act, over controls on earth, but it's liver specifically affecting the stomach, making the stomach qi, rebel.

So acid reflux, belching, sour taste, nausea. The feeling of lump in the throat is called Plum Pit Syndrome, and Plum Pit Syndrome feels like you're trying to swallow, you're trying, um, um, trying to swallow this, um, um, um. little ball of phlegm or a plum pit that's got a little ball of phlegm that's in my throat.

You know, there's nothing there because you drink water and stuff. There's nothing there, but it feels like there is. That is usually a liver qi stagnation that's affecting the gallbladder as well. And there is phlegm as well, but there's not physically something. in there. This is a stress thing that usually goes within two to three days for most patients.

But when you've never had it, you don't really know what that is. It's very common. I've had it. If you've had it, you know exactly what I'm talking about. And the pulse is wiry because the person is tense. With liver qi stagnation, the tongue stays normal. Now, if someone gets really, really stressed, they have liver yang rising.

So liver yang rising is this next stage of being overstressed for too long. And what liver yang rising is, it's like a volcano that's bubbling, bubbling, bubbling, and then explodes. and then comes back down. So liver yang rising is not always there. It stems from liver qi stagnation. There's this explosion of anger.

Someone lashes out, gets angry. Maybe they have a temporal headache at the end of the day. Maybe they have insomnia. They wake up between one and 3 a. m. because there's so much

stress, right? They get that tinnitus or ear ringing. That's like high pitch for a few seconds or a minute or two, and it goes away.

That is liver yang rising. But the next day they go back down to liver qi stagnation and then there's more stress put upon them. And then at the end of the day, the liver yang explodes again, like a little volcano and then comes up again. So liver yang rising rises and comes back down. That's why it's not a pattern that's always, always constant, but the more it comes, the more it can lead to liver fire, right?

To stay the volcano is staying, the explosion keeps going, it doesn't stop, right? That would be the outcome eventually. So, with liver yang rising, the pulse would be wiry rapid, but only the sides of the tongue would be red, okay? Because this is something that comes up and down. With liver fire now, we'll full Under the fire, it's not coming and going, it's there constantly.

So the red sides are also going to have a yellow coat on the tongue, right? Specifically on the side, but also it could be all over the tongue if there's a lot of fire, and the whole tongue can be red if the fire's been there for a long time. So now the temporal headache will feel really good when you put a cold compress on it, right?

So it'll feel much better with a cold patch. The person will be rageful. I called that The Tasmanian Devil pattern of TCM if you know who the Tasmanian devil is, he was a cute little cartoon that had smoke coming out of his ears. That's pretty much the liver fire, right? So you're on fire, you have smoke coming out of your ears.

There is thirst of course, 'cause this fire, constipation, dark urine because this person's fire is drying all the fluid. If the person gets angry enough, they could literally have a nosebleed. And that's very common with children. When children get so mad, they can make themselves have a nosebleed.

That's very common. So those are the three patterns that are very much related in TCM and can be the catalyst of one from the other, from the other. So it's a liver qi stagnation following by liver yang rising, and eventually can turn into liver fire. The higher it is, the harder it is to treat, but obviously it just takes a bit of time.

But it's really, really good with acupuncture and a diet, and of course you can use herbal formula as well. I've had lots of people with liver yang rising in my practice and acupuncture is such a great tool for those patterns, of stagnation, because it really helps move qi. That's one of the best benefits of, acupuncture.

Damp heat in the liver. So let's look at first dampness and the heat, and then we'll talk about what that means. So damp heat in the liver, the heat you could see there's fever.

Fever is the heat. Rapid pulse and a yellow coat on the tongue. So that's all heat. If we look at the dampness, we will see the nausea, the vomiting, the bloating, the yellow discharge from the vagina.

So the discharge from the vagina is Dampness, because it's an abnormal discharge, it's a lot, but it's yellow, so that's heat. Okay, if it was white, it would be cold, but if it's yellow, it's heat, and the discharge is damp. The swelling, red scrotum, the swelling is damp, the red is heat, right? The yellow face and sclera, so the yellow face and sclera, that is dampness in TCM.

If it's yellowish red, then it's damp heat, right? So sclera of the eye, the white of the eye. The jaundice is damp heat, right? So, when you look at all this, There's two things. If the damp heat is in the liver itself, it's an acute problem like jaundice, like hepatitis, and that's why there's fever, and then there's yellow face and jaundice and nausea, vomiting, bloating, etc.

So that part is damp heat that's affecting the liver itself. The other side, which usually those symptoms are not related at all, is to have damp heat in the meridian or in the channel. If you have damp heat in the channel or in the meridian, it is going to affect the external genitalia area. Okay? So you're not going to have, yellow face and jaundice and nausea and vomiting.

You are going to have, depending if you're a man or woman, itchy and yellow discharge from the vagina. So like maybe a yeast infection or swelling, red scrotum. You could also have let's say if someone had herpes, genital herpes, they would have an outbreak of yellow pus, itchy, painful redness in the area that's also damp heat in the liver channel.

And they would not have vomiting and nausea and jaundice, okay? Those are two separated pattern, but they're both damp heat and liver. It's just one is in the organ, one is in the meridian. So I hope I made that clear. The pulse, though, and the tongue would be the same. It would be slippery, that's damp, wiry, rapid, so rapid is the heat, and wiry, it's affecting the liver.

And then the tongue is red, which is heat, yellow coat is heat, but a sticky or greasy coat, which is the dampness. Okay, the next pattern is liver insulting the lungs. So that's the five element theory, right? Using the five element theory, when the liver is in excess, it is insulting back the lung because the lung or metal is supposed to control wood.

Now wood is insulting back or pushing back towards metal. So liver insulting the lung is basically excess liver depleting lung qi. It's usually a liver yang rising or liver fire, it's excess liver. So there is going to be maybe temporal headaches, bitter taste in the mouth, rib pain, moodiness, probably anger, right?

Lots and lots of stress. So there's liver that has lots of heat, which the red size shows. It's like a liver yang rising, right? And the yellow coat. So that shows liver yang rising or liver fire if it goes to the next level and that's affecting the lung, depleting the lung. So the person now in the lung symptoms is short of breath, has maybe a wheezing, so asthma if they have asthma, but maybe just wheezing, difficulty inhaling, right?

and coughing yellow, yellow is heat coming from the liver, or bloody phlegm. Okay, so that would be liver fire. If it's blood, it's liver fire that's affecting the lung. So those two are combined often and that would show in that perspective.

Very different. Now let's look at one that's different as well. It's liver yang generating wind. Okay, so wind is the element that's related to wood and to liver, right? Now, external wind is a pathogen, and that's an acute problem. Internal wind is a different story. So how do we get internal wind? Internal wind can come up from liver yang rising.

It can also come up from liver yin deficiency, body fluid deficiency, liver blood deficiency, or liver fire. So there's lots of patterns that can show internal wind. To give you an idea, internal wind means that things are going to move, right? So there may be convulsions, deviation of eyes or mouth, like with Bell's palsy or hemiplegia. right, or after a stroke, for example. That's liver yang generating wind. So if someone has high blood pressure, which is liver yang rising, right, blood pressure rises, kind of like the volcano, it may lead to a stroke, right?

So that would be liver yang generating wind. A stroke is definitely brought on and it's called internal wind. Okay. So, of course, difficulty in speaking and speech because, of course, the person's mouth is deviated. They've maybe had a stroke. But Bell's palsy can also be that as well, depending of the symptoms, right?

And the person may faint. They have red cheeks, low grade fever, dry mouth because The liver yang rising also can lead to liver yin deficiency as well. So that can show up as well when the wind is there. So we have a wiry, rapid pulse, but thin because the yin deficiency is coming. So there's a red tongue, but it's peeled because there's yin deficiency and it's deviated because there's internal wind.

Okay. So that's my Basic, made easy, internal wind explanation. And the last two are liver blood deficiency and liver yin deficiency. Liver blood deficiency can lead to liver yin deficiency. Not always, but that's one that can happen. So remember, easy peasy. We've done this a few minutes ago. Liver blood deficiency is pale and poor, pale face, pale nail, brittle nails as well.

They will break easily when there's blood deficiency. Pale lips, numbness, tingling. Pins and needles in the limbs or extremities, and then the insomnia, which is waking up between 1 and 3, and having a hard time falling back asleep. Blurred vision, the eye floaters, the spots in front of the eyes, that's also a liver blood deficiency, right?

Poor vision, poor sleep, we said that. Menstruation wise, it would be very light flow, so scanty, menses blood, or very short. Maybe the lasts maybe, A day or a day and a half, that's also can be the case, that's the liver blood deficiency, not storing enough blood for the menstruation. Weak muscle because blood is produced by the spleen in TCM by the food we ingest and liver stores it.

So sometimes when spleen is not able to produce blood, then liver cannot store it and so muscle cramps and muscle weakness can ensue as well. Okay? The pulse would be thin and choppy. Choppy is a blood related, pulse, and thin is because there's not enough. So it's a thin, choppy pulse, compared to a blood stasis would be more a choppy, wiry pulse, right?

Because it's qi signation leads to blood stasis. A pale tongue specifically, of course, on the side. And we said the liver yin deficiency, of course, is the one that dries the eyes with blurred vision, the red cheeks, the night sweat, irritability, probably insomnia as well. We talked about earlier as well.

The pulse is thin or thready and wiry, and then the tongue is red and no coat or very dry coat. that's comparing. I hope the pattern differentiation was very helpful. This is very quick to the point inquiry TCM diagnosis made easy.

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