

Today I'm taking you inside a real TCM case from my clinic: a 29-year-old female who's struggling with PMS and tension headaches.

I'm gonna share with you how I make my diagnosis step by step and share the full treatment plan, including acupuncture points, herbal formula, and diet tips, and how I get there and put it all together.

By the end of this, I guarantee you will feel way more confident tackling these kind of patterns in your clinic. Let's go.

Welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture. Easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I am your host, Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students and 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.

This female patient is 29 years old, and her chief complaint is mostly problem with pre menstruation syndrome or PMS, so she has breast tenderness prior to menstruation, frequent tension headaches for the past year that have been really bothering her, and she's very irritable.

Sounds familiar. I think we deal with a lot of this in practice. I know I have.

Let's look at more symptoms because obviously the more details we have, the better it is for us to make the right diagnosis and therefore the right treatment plan.

The key symptoms are mood swings and emotional sensitivity, especially before menstruation. So mood swings means that sometimes she's really irritable and she lashes out, and the next moment she'll be feeling down, maybe even crying. It kind of goes back and forth, right? It feels like unstable, and that's how patient describe it. This patient is also very sensitive prior to menstruation, as in sensitive to light, to sound, and to anything around her and what happened.

Her response to what happened or what conversation she has brings a lot of emotional turmoil and that affects her specifically at that time. Again, this is the hormonal imbalances that we see in clinical practice with a lot of patients. I've had a lot of PMS irritability and mood swings. Uh, when I used to have a period I'm now past, I'm in my late fifties, so I don't have to deal with this anymore.

Yay. She also experienced frequent sighing. As she's sitting in front of me and talking, she does a lot of. Ah. The sighing that's usually due to stress when we feel like, ugh, so overwhelmed, so tense, right?

Sighing is a really good clue that we use in TCM for listening. You know how we have the four methods of diagnosis? One is inquiry, which is the big one. Then it's observation like the tongue and the face, et cetera. Then we have auscultation, which means listening.

And smelling. But the listening part allows us to really pay attention. So this is combining observation, which is more visual with listening, which is listening to the person sign. Make sense? Okay.

The next symptom is distension and tension in the rib area or hypochondriac region. So she kind of feels not bloated, but uncomfortable, like it's tight. This is a diaphragm that gets really tight. So when we're stress, we're not able to take big, deep breath and our diaphragm is tight it's not able to expand and relax our ribs. Now that's very common as well, when people are stressed. See, we get a lot of stress symptoms for this patient.

And the last key symptom is tension headaches that are worse in the temporal area and behind the eyes or orbital area and are worse on stress. Okay, so this whole thing is due to stress, so we know where we're going with this.

That is a liver qi stagnation coming up, right? We all know as soon as we're stressed, we're tight, we're tense. Liver qi stagnation is part of this picture.

Now let's look at other symptoms. She has occasional red eyes and dry throat.

And then the week prior to her period, she's more irritable. Like we said at the beginning, she has breast tenderness and she's bloating. Or easily bloated.

Specifically at the end of the day, we have a lot of different kind of bloating at the end of the day is not the same as bloated after meal.

Her menstruation is irregular, so it doesn't come where she thinks it well. Sometimes it's a week early, sometimes it's a week late, so she's not quite sure when it comes. So irregular menstruation and when she bleeds her menstruation has dark clots in the blood. And she gets a lot of cramping, specifically the first two days.

She also experiences heartburn and acid reflex quite often, and she is thirsty most of the time.

But that's because she doesn't drink a lot of fluids and she drinks a lot of coffee. But not water or tea or high water content, food, like let's say cucumbers, tomatoes, soup broth, et cetera. So that's another problem too, right? Diet can come in play here because diet is at the center of our health.

Her tongue has red sides with a slight yellow coat in the center of the tongue, and the pulse is wiry. Specifically in the left Guan position, Guan position, left side is the middle side, right? We have to guess the three position of the pulse tone is the first one or the one that is closer to the wrist, and then the guan is the middle position, and the chi is the rear position. So with her it's very wirey on the left middle position, and it's slightly rapid.

I didn't share all her symptoms because I wanted to make this case study easy for you to grasp and easy for us to go through. There was a few more, but those were the main ones. So I wanted to focus on that because you have to remember, when you do a TCM diagnosis, you want as much information as possible, including health history, which I am not sharing here again, because I just want us to look at it in a simple way.

Make sense? Okay. So when we look at the diagnosis before we do, we always look for the root causes because the root cause will tell us. What to look for when it comes to patterns. She is a paralegal working in a law firm, so her job is very stressful, so stress is a big part of it. The second one is her diet. She doesn't eat really well. She eats on the go. She drinks a lot of coffee, like I said earlier, doesn't eat a lot of high water content, food.

Mostly she eats takeout, so not really feeding the digestive system. Right. Makes sense. I did not talk about a bowel movement, but she has tendency to have constipation. But during the PMS or prior to menstruation, she has a bit of IBS, meaning alternating constipation and diarrhea. Her bowel movements are quite smelly.

I just wanted to add this up so we get a clear picture.

Now that we know there's a lot of stress, we know we have to look at liver because liver gets stressed out and we get liver qi stagnation.

Makes sense. Right? And because her diet is not that great, it's not feeding the body and there is some digestive issues, then we also have to look at the spleen and stomach or the middle jiao.

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Because if you're not, I will have the link for you below. Make sure to get on it because I share a lot that is not on social media every week, including case studies. So if you don't wanna miss out on the content I share and tips and tricks that I share only in my newsletter, make sure to join. It's completely free and you'll get so much out of it.

Now let's look at my framework that I use every time I do a diagnosis for a patient. Number one, let's look at the eight principles. Is this an excess or a deficiency? I think we all agree that there is no deficiency symptoms there and it's an excess.

Is it a heat or a cold issue? I think we can all agree that there's heat symptoms. We're gonna analyze them one by one in a minute, but we can agree that it's excess and there's heat as well. That's showing up. And then the next one is, is this an internal or external problem?

Internal problem, or more chronic? They're affecting the organs while external are acute or they're affecting the musculoskeletal body. So we can agree. This is internal, so it's internal. It's excess, it's heat. And then the last one is, is this more yin or more y? Obviously if it's excess, it's heat that is more y.

Internal is more yin, but there's too young versus a yin. So this is a Y issue. Yes. So this is using the eight principle. The next one is we look at the four vital substances. Is there chi issue? Blood body fluid or essence when it comes to this. We can see that there is probably some liver qi stagnation. There's also some stomach qi rebelling, heartburn acid reflux. So Q is affected. Is there blood? Do we see blood stasis? Maybe it's a bit of stagnation with the clots in the blood and the painful menstruation.

So let's think of that. Is there blood deficiency? I don't see any pale. No poor vision? No fatigue? No. Pale and poor. Is there blood, heat? Probably not because blood. Heat means bleeding. Okay. So there may be some blood stasis. So there's chi and blood so far. Body fluid. There's a bit of thirst and there's some dryness, so maybe the body fluids are a little bit deficient.

Makes sense. Right. . In essence, I think we're good. Now we have chi issue. And blood issue. The next one is looking at the zfu organs. Which organs are affected? Well, we know liver is affected and liver moose qi, so we kind of go liver qi stagnation as our primary.

We agree. Then the next one is that stomach chi rebelling and a lot of heat that comes up with the heartburn and the red sides of the tongue and the irritability that comes in as a little

bit of a liver yang rising during PMS, so that. Tells us that there is a bit of liver, young or liver affected by heat because there's also red eyes.

And then we see a little bit of stomach heat due to the stomach chi rebelling and the yellow coat on the tongue and slightly rapid pulse. And is there any spleen issue? There's a bit of diarrhea during PMS. However, the diarrhea is smelly.

That means it's probably more some damp heat in the stomach or large intestine. So stomach and liver are both affected? Yes. Okay. The next frame is looking at the five elements to understand the mechanism, how it all started, how it all occurred. What is the characteristic of this patient's diagnosis? So when we look at the controlling sequence of the five element would controls earth or liver.

Control, spin and stomach. Now we don't have any spin symptoms in here, so I will say that the liver that is stagnated, that is excess, that is overpowering, it's over controlling stomach, and when stomach is over controlled, it rebels, it goes up. And so we have heartburn, acid reflux that comes up and some thirst as well.

So this is a case with the five element where it's. Would over control earth or liver Affecting the stomach? Yes, because her symptoms are worse on stress, right? Even the heartburn, the acid reflux, all the stomach issue are worse on stress, which means worse with the liver qi stagnation.

Is that helpful? now that we have our diagnosis, liver qi stagnation, and stomach heat, let's look at each symptoms to see how we came with this conclusion.

Her chief complaint is irritability, PMS, with breast tenderness, frequent tension headache in the past year, so obviously PMS, anything that happened prior to menstruation, if it is excess like breast tenderness, like irritability and headaches. That's a liver qi stagnation. Now, if there was a lot of fatigue as well and feeling really, really down and sleepy and tired, that could be also that spleen.

She was deficient, and it's common as well to see liver qi stagnation depleting the spleen, and so we could have those two. However, for her, it created more of a rebelling excess stomach heat. The mood swings are a liver qi stagnation and the emotional sensitivity is affecting the earth element, which is spin and stomach. The frequent sighing is always a liver qi stagnation. She also has distended pain in the rib area.

That is also a liver qi stagnation. The temporal headaches. We know temporal headaches are related to the liver and gallbladder, and then behind the eyes or orbital is related to the

stomach. So now we have this Yong Ming headache, which is the stomach headache. And then we have this shower yang headache, which affects the gallbladder.

Yes, so the gallbladder is the one that goes around the ear. So we will use gallbladder point to help this patient, but we know it comes from a liver yang rising from the stress that's been boiling, and then it rises up. Up the stomach is also affected with heat, which rises up. And so now we have the temporal headache behind the eyes, but we also have occasional red eyes.

And you know that in the dong the liver opens into the eyes. So if we have red eyes. Obviously there heat affecting the liver, and again, this is a liver yang rising. It's not always there. It's occasional.

There's also dry throat. That's the body fluid we were talking about that's a little bit deficient. The dry throat shows body fluid deficiency due to the excess heat. The heat dries the fluid, so it's not really too deficient. Although it'd be great for her to drink more fluid and to hydrate. We really wanna focus on bringing the heat down so the body can have enough fluid and doesn't dry up.

Yes. Okay, now during the PMS, she has breast and a nest, which we said was liver qi stagnation, but she also has bloating that is worse with stress. Now we have a lot of bloating. One of them is bloating after meals. That's a spleen sheet efficiency with dampness, but bloating that is worse at the end of the day where the pants get tighter and tighter and tighter.

That is a liver qi stagnation.

She has irregular menstruation, so those are hormone imbalance. Here we have to dig a little bit more. I haven't shared that 'cause I didn't wanna focus on that at this time. But she had clots and painful menstruation, which we know can be blood stasis. now if the pain gets better with a heat pad, then that means they would be cold and blood stasis.

But we didn't talk about this, but she did not have that issue, and the pain was not that bad during menstruation. So I think it's a liver chi stagnation slowly leading to liver blood stasis, because QI moves blood. So eventually if chi stagnates for too long, then eventually we're gonna get blood stasis or liver blood stasis, and we're gonna get it.

And clots. So while we do the treatment, we have to think of this ahead of time. Wow, okay. There's liver chi stagnation. There's not a lot of liver blood stasis, but it's coming. So we should move blood as well as she in our treatment plan.

Yes. and the last ones are the stomach heat symptoms, heartburn, acid reflux are stomach cherry rebelling with heat, right?

Because it's heart burning, it's burning. The reflux is sour regurgitation, so that is heat. And then she has thirst, so that is also heat in the stomach.

The red sides of the tongue means the summer liver yang rising and the yellow coat in the center where the stomach is located. That's excess heat in the stomach, so everything correlate for us.


Her pulse is wiry. That's the liver qi stagnation, specifically at the liver position on the left middle side. And it's slightly rapid because there's some stomach heat.

So many people ask me all the time, what's the difference between all your three books? I don't know which one to get. If you're a visual person, you're gonna love these books because they're colorful with lots of graphics. They do come in PDF format as well, which all have video links to compliment them. Now Accupoints made easy. My orange book covers all acupuncture points, function, location, my clinical pearls and everything that relates to acupuncture points. My second book, Chinese Medicine, made Easy is really geared to understanding theory in TCM.

And being able to do diagnosis. I have a lot of case studies. I have my intake form that you can use with your patients ' because it is a fillable one. This book is great to reinforce your TCM diagnosis. The last one is Chinese medicine.

Treatment made easy and it covers over 160 syndromes and all the TCM patterns associated with each syndromes like insomnia. And their acupuncture point for each pattern as well as formula, ear point, and so much more. So now you understand why each book has its own little function and the feedback on all three of them has been amazing.

I have a lot of people that get all three because they're so useful and I created them just for you.

And if you wanna check them out or invest in any of them, the link is in the show notes.  So now let's look at treatment. Your treatment principles should dictate what point selection you are going to make. First, we have to move liver chi, but we said earlier because she moves, blood will also move blood, increase that circulation, increase blood circulation and qi circulation.

To relax the person. We're gonna clear stomach, heat, and bring stomach chi down. We are gonna try to regulate menstruation and we're gonna calm the mind because she's really stressed, right? She's irritable, she's sighing, she's too stressed. So we're gonna calm the mind. There are many ways to do this. This is what I wanna share I did with her.

To move Qi and blood, we are gonna open the gate liver three and large intestine four. Then we wanna relax the body and continue to move liver qi and to relax the shoulder and all the tension and the ribs and everywhere. Gallbladder 34 grade to relax the body. I love that point. I know everybody loves liver three because it moves liver chi when there is stagnation.

But gallbladder 34 is the best point to reinforce that function, so it should be there.

I would like to put liver 14 because it is the front-mu point of the liver. Great for any rib pain areas, liver stagnation and upper digestive tract issue like nausea, acid reflux, and stomach heat. So it's the best point to do.

I get this question a lot. Do you do liver 14 only on the liver side as in the organ side, and I'm like, no, I usually do it bilaterally

unless I'm wanted to address liver 13 and liver 14, because liver 13 is the frontal point of the spleen, and if I wanna connect the two, then I might do liver 13 on the left and liver 14 on the right. But that's the only case where I would do this. Then of course we're gonna do points to bring stomach Q down.

Pericardium six, ren 17, which is more local. Those are great to bring stomach chi down. We also wanna help the digestive system overall. So I would like to put stomach 36 and then that liver yang rising, which creates the headache. Liver two is great to break that irritability down the headaches down. So I would wanna do that point specifically a week or two before PMS happens so we can prevent it from happening.

For the headaches. Large intestine four works because it's the best point for headaches and it goes to the face. So that's great. We have this one,

We can also add local point like Ty Yong, which is one of the best point for temporal headache. Or you can use gallbladder nine, gallbladder 10, all the gallbladder points if you wanted to address the gallbladder meridian at the temporal area as well. You can play with this when it comes to local point, follow your intuition,

And we said we wanna calm the mind for stress. So you can use Yong, our favorite calming the mind point, the zen button, like some of my patients call it. You can use Chenin.

Whatever feels right. I mean liver three is going to calm the mind as well as liver two is going to calm the mind.

Pericardium six, re 17. Really good to relax the body. So a lot of them already are doing that function, so we don't need to add up a lot of points. I. Of the school of thoughts that the least amount of points, the better for the patients and the faster the results.

Okay, now we have to talk about TCM diet tips because obviously this is really important, right? , Now first we wanna avoid anything that's gonna create more heat and more stagnation. So spicy food, alcohol, but also greasy fried food, which creates stagnation.

Chocolate if it has a lot of sugar, if it doesn't have a lot of sugar, if it's bitter chocolate with like 90% chocolate, then you're fine. And this is all good. And of course we don't wanna drink a lot of stimulants like caffeine or energy drinks specifically prior to the period. We wanna try to sip. Some teas to bring that hydration, right?

So it'd be great if she has broth or tea like crescent tea. Peppermint mint tea, which are very cooling, but also will help her with hydration because obviously she's drinking fluid, right? And then we wanna have calming tea like rose. Came mal. Those are very calm. You can have lavender. She doesn't have a lot of problems sleeping, which is great, but we wanna have teas that are being a bit more calming.

We wanna eat warm, regular meals, meaning we don't wanna run around. We wanna sit down and be mindful. This is the hardest part for patients because that is something that most people, specifically in North America, just eat really quickly and on the go all the time. It's part of the culture, unfortunately.

We wanna emphasize on green leafy vegetables, which are great for the liver, or adding sour food like lemon or apple cider vinegar. But it's always good to have a bit more cooked food because it's easier on the digestive system, but not a lot of spicy food, again, because of the stomach heat.

We don't wanna give too much cold food because that would deplete the spleen. We have to be more gentle because we wanna bring stomach heat down, but we don't wanna create issue for the spleen.

The last one is to look at herbal formulas. I know not everybody does formulas, but I love Chinese herbal formulas. So let's look at the options when it comes to formula. Try who sen. Is a great formula for liver qi stagnation. Now, if you're doing acupuncture regularly, like

twice a week, or at least every week, you probably won't need this formula because the acupuncture will do the same as the formula.

However, if the person cannot come or they go on holiday, Chai Hu Shu Gan San is a great add-on to have while the person is not able to get acupuncture.

When it comes to the stomach heat, there's a great formula called Qing Wei San, and that will bring the stomach heat down.

This formula should not be taken too long because it might deplete the spleen. So this should be just temporary. I'd rather this person eats well and avoid the spicy food to bring that stomach heat down than give her a formula.

Now there's also a formula called Zuo Jin Wan, and don't quote me on my pronunciation of Mandarin 'cause it's just not good. So Zuo Jin Wan is great when there's liver stagnation over controlling stomach, creating stomach chewy bellying with heat. That is the perfect formula for this patient.

If this is what we want it to do, however, acupuncture and diet and mindfulness. We will go a long way without the formula, so it's up to you.

This is how I approach this case after two months of weekly session and adapting my treatment to add more hormonal balancing points like spleen four, pericardium six, long seven, and kidney six, and spleen six.

Her menstruation cycle was regular. The headaches were gone. The PMS was gone. TCM rocks.

I get a lot of requests from people to do more case study to show my process when it comes to diagnosing and treatment principle in selecting my treatment plan.

I'm gonna do more case study in the future because I think they're very helpful if you feel this really, really helped you. Make sure to subscribe. And until next time, 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, live 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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