

DIETARY TREATMENT FOR CONDITIONS CALLED WIND

By Andrew Sterman

Of the six climatic influences of Chinese medicine (cold, heat, dampness, dryness, summer heat, and wind), the idea of wind is the most difficult to understand. It is the least tangible, the most mysterious, the furthest from modern thinking. Wind is pure movement, not a thing. Go out into a fierce gale with an open box, close the lid around the wind, and of course, upon opening the box indoors, we find absolutely no trace of what was so destructive only moments ago. Wind can destroy, or it can set journeys in motion. It is a concept that is inherently impossible to grasp.

In ancient times, many illnesses—particularly any with sudden onset—were said to result from an evil influence, a demon or entity that rode somehow on the winds. It wasn't that wind itself caused illness; the disturbance was caused by the entity that entered with wind as its medium for invasion. If we protected against wind, we could protect ourselves from the disturbance of sudden-onset illness.

As people gradually came to put less stock in demons and spirits, wind itself became seen as the pathological factor, standing along with cold, the principal pathogenic factor of the *Shang Han Lun* and its living tradition. Seeing cold as a primary factor in disease is a very powerful working tool. Cold is any influence that slows function down, beginning a traceable progression of illness. Taking a place next to cold, wind became not the carrier of spirits but the direct influence responsible for disruption of stability (and therefore still responsible for sudden-onset illnesses).

As scholarly medicine progressed and shamanic or folk ideas continued to recede into society's unconscious, the idea of wind became metaphoric: wind illnesses are those that not only come on suddenly, but that resemble wind. The term wind took on a poetic usage. Physical signs and symptoms of wind in the body resemble leaves fluttering (tics, trembling, restless leg syndrome), disruption of stability (dizziness, symptoms that move around the body), disruption of the surface of the lake (rashes, itchiness), and at times catastrophic wind storms (seizures, heart attacks, and strokes).

The signature brilliance of Chinese medicine is the complete integration of poetic and physical points of view, the ability to shift fluently between levels and ways of thought. Wind can be simultaneously a collection of signs and symptoms, a specific problem "caught" through exposed areas of the neck, a metaphor, or a problem poetically (and effectively) described as a disturbance, like something caused by a pernicious spirit. The clinician has all this available for communicating with specific patients and planning the ways forward. If it were more predictable or more tangible, it wouldn't be wind.

Causes of Wind Residency

Wind is a climatic factor and therefore external, but not everyone is equally susceptible. Susceptibility to external wind conditions (sudden onset of common cold, flu, Bell's palsy, or other maladies) and internal wind scenarios (neurological and

psychological issues of various kinds) all are due to relative degrees of deficiency. Deficiency can be in blood (medium-ship) or in qi (vacuity of the channels). Wind takes up residence (chronic status) based on a vacuity condition.

Furthermore, just as in nature, wind and fire mutually support each other. In other words, internal heat and associated dryness increases susceptibility to wind. Internal wind will move inflammation around, presenting symptoms that are confusing to the patient: "First it was here, then that was gone and it was there; it's a mystery..." Dampness and even signs of cold may arise in response to heat and wind in a complicated choreography of internal responses.

Qi deficiency is one of the deficiencies underlying wind symptoms, in other words, just as with "catching a cold," our best protection is being well-rested, well-hydrated, and well-fed. Looking more deeply, it is essential to know that qi deficiency can also result from chronic wind, as the body uses resources to subdue internal wind. Wind consumes resources. A motto in Chinese medicine states, "If wind is ignored, fatigue results."

Clinicians may have preferences whether to begin by building resources or clearing wind, but generally speaking, blood and qi deficiency, heat, digestion, and wind will all need to be addressed.

Common Herbal Strategies

Xu Duchan summarizes his reading of the traditional strategy for clearing wind as follows:

First, the wind is to be dispersed with herbs like perilla leaf (*zi su ye*) and schizonepeta (*jing jie*); second, phlegm is to be transformed with herbs like pinellia (*ban xia*) and fritillaria (*bei mu*); third, descend the qi with herbs like perilla seed (*zi su zi*) and peucedanum (*qian hu*); fourth, harmonize *ying* (nutritive) qi and *wei* (defensive) qi with herbs like cinnamon twig (*gui zhi*) and peony root (*bai shao*); fifth, nourish fluids with herbs like trichosanthes seed (*gua lou*) and scrophularia (*xuan shen*); sixth, blood is to be nourished with herbs like angelica sinensis (*dang gui*) and donkey hide gelatin (*e jiao*); seventh, fire is to be cooled with herbs like scutellaria (*huang qin*) and gardenia blossom (*zhi zi*); and eighth, the lungs are to be regulated with herbs like morus bark (*sang bai pi*) and arctium seed (*niu bang zi*).

In other words, it's not sufficient to treat wind in a simple way. We must use a full strategy (although not all at once):

- ✦ Expel wind
- ✦ Transform phlegm (improve digestion)
- ✦ Descend or anchor qi
- ✦ Nourish fluids
- ✦ Build blood
- ✦ Clear heat
- ✦ Harmonize *ying* and *wei* qi
- ✦ Regulate lung qi

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Dietary Strategies

Bringing herbal strategies into the kitchen requires the ability to simplify theory and the willingness to see things in broad terms. Kitchen medicine, particularly when applied as a general adjustment to daily eating, enacts change through long-term application of somewhat less-powerful agents than medicinal herbs.

Before applying foods that treat wind conditions, it's essential to begin by abstaining from foods that contribute to or sustain the problems. These are usually foods that raise heat, deplete fluids, overstimulate *wei qi*, increase phlegm or disrupt the relationship between nourishment and immunity (this is the aspect of *ying qi* and *wei qi* harmony). As with reflux or many other problems, individuals often report that they "live on" foods that are hurting them and resist change (especially if dampness is prevalent). Common offenders include:

- ✦ onions, garlic, hot peppers
- ✦ alcohol
- ✦ coffee, chocolate
- ✦ sugar and sweetened foods
- ✦ dairy, especially cheese
- ✦ nightshades (peppers/capsicum, tomatoes, white potatoes, eggplant)
- ✦ fried foods
- ✦ processed or GMO foods
- ✦ personal allergens, often including wheat
- ✦ skipping breakfast/eating late into the night
- ✦ avoiding water

Eliminating offending foods often is enough to bring substantial improvement. When further treatment is needed, diet can be used to enact the same strategies used in herbal medicine:

To expel or disperse wind, it's necessary to open the exterior, using spices (cinnamon, mint, and shiso, for example).

To transform phlegm, use kitchen herbs and spices that aid digestion (citrus peel, ginger, turmeric, nutmeg, cumin, coriander, cardamom, caraway, allspice, star anise, fennel seed, sage, tarragon, etc.)

To descend or anchor qi, use grains and legumes (rice, brown rice, millet, oats, barley, and lentils, black beans, adzuki beans, etc.) Also use nuts (almonds, walnuts, chestnuts) and seeds (sunflower, pumpkin, chia, sesame, flax). Kale also descends qi, as do root vegetables (carrots, daikon, parsnips, parsley root, sweet potato).

Nourishing fluids and building blood are key to preventing and treating wind symptoms. This should be a primary focus and is often where I begin. Congee, millet porridge, oats, and wet-cooked breakfasts are the best way to nourish thin and thick fluids, including stomach yin and lung yin, as well as to re-balance the hormonal complement. Soups and stews continue this part of the strategy for lunch and dinner. [See my previous article, **Building Blood Sufficiency Through Kitchen Medicine in the Fall 2019 Golden Flower Newsletter.**] Beef soup or stew with spices to aid digestion makes

it easy, as does egg added to congee or soup. Building blood with vegetarian foods is also possible; use berries, lentil soup, adzuki or black beans with rice, beets, green leafy vegetables such as kale, collard, bok choy, scallions, and so forth.

To clear heat, it is most important to avoid creating more heat. Reduce or eliminate fried foods, sugar, hot chili-type spices, alcohol, overly processed or GMO foods, onions and garlic, and personal allergens. Sticky foods such as sugar, cheese, and gluten tend to trap heat, which then circulates further when amplified by continued use of the usual irritants or the body's own attempts to raise heat to clear problems. It is important to reduce or eliminate these foods in order to allow healing to proceed. Then, to actively clear heat, dramatically increase the amount of cooked green vegetables (kale, cabbages, bok choy, etc.), include some bitter greens (dandelion, asparagus, radicchio, endive, chicory greens, artichoke, olives), increase greens that have a clearing effect on the liver and gallbladder (string beans, snow peas, watercress), sprouts (mung bean sprouts, radish sprouts, bamboo shoots, Brussels sprouts, microgreens), and fermented vegetables (sauerkraut, mild kimchi, naturally made pickles). A note of caution: those who love bitter greens as part of a full diet rarely develop the vacuity and stagnation that underlies blood deficiency and wind scenarios, but if wind is present, the sudden introduction of the descending and cooling quality of bitter greens can drive wind invasion deeper: something to be avoided. The clinician must assess and advise. To avoid a problem, ensure the exterior is open and the avenues of elimination are working (spices, parsley, cilantro, dill, beans, whole grains) before using bitter greens.

Harmonizing *ying qi* and *wei qi* is a concept unique to Chinese medicine, but it's something all people need to do. It's important to be able to understand this type of idea in practical terms without the need for technical terminology. Defensive qi or immunocompetence (included in the idea of *wei qi*) is derived from food and fluids, well-digested and well-circulated. This is the idea that qi and fluids must be extracted from food and drink (separated), broken down and made our own (transformed), then brought first to the lungs and then to the skin or exterior (transported). Problems of nourishment (*ying qi*) will deprive immunocompetence (*wei qi*) in specific and profound ways. In other words, having good digestion with enough well-chosen foods (and hydration) is essential to being able to meet cold and flu season, ward off dangerous illness, or balance the myriad internal functions of immunity. With this in mind, we can understand why chronic dehydration underlies many illnesses (especially auto-immune conditions), why stimulating the immune system is not a recipe for success (with excess and constant garlic, for example), and why harmonizing *ying* and *wei qi* is central to resolving conditions of wind.

Regulating lung qi is an important part of harmonizing *ying* and *wei*. *Wei qi* is very much a lung function; in other words, the lungs are primary in immune defense. The lungs control the exterior and must have sufficient fluid and qi available to manage the body's ability to sweat. This is where we began

this list of strategies to clear wind symptoms: with the use of foods to open the exterior (cinnamon, mint, shiso). If fluids are full and lung qi well-regulated (and in good harmony with the liver, which can exert an overly-restraining effect on the lungs), hot spices such as garlic and chili peppers can also be important (but only if skillfully used).

For this checklist I have followed Xu Duchan's brisk summary, paraphrased above. It's extremely useful to compare that with your own favorite strategies for treating wind. For example, the strategies encoded in the often-used teaching formula Disperse Wind Powder (Xiao Feng San).

Foods with Special Properties to Dispel Wind

In my practice I focus on 1) eliminating dietary habits that keep problems locked in place and 2) good eating that supports renewed post-natal integrity. But there are some foods that specifically help to clear wind; and while I hope no one simply adds them to a problematic diet, these foods are important to understand before offering some recipes.

- Olives, asparagus, artichokes, sprouts, and shoots all have properties to disperse or release wind. These make the best appetizers or vegetable snacks if wind is present. When shopping, look for fine olives to snack on when cooking. Remember, frequent repetition is necessary to benefit from a food medicinally.

- Watercress and similar vegetables are spicy and bitter, with a strong liver/gallbladder affinity. The spicy note helps open the exterior while the bitter note helps clear the liver. Mustard greens are more spicy than bitter; dandelion, broccoli rabe, and radicchio more bitter than spicy. Use greens in combination to fine-tune medicinal intention and strategy.

- Stagnation forces the body to amplify heat which exacerbates wind in the channels. Break-up blood stagnation with scallions, chives, leeks, and shallots. Bulb onions can be too hot, garlic must be used with care (see below).

- Garlic can be used to penetrate obstructions even more strongly than the aromatics just listed, but to use garlic responsibly hydration must be established and maintained with congee, porridges, soups, stews, and the avoidance of dehydrating habits. To keep things moving and improve digestion when garlic has been overused already, rely on fresh ginger.

- Berries help build blood, crucial for ridding wind (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, goji berries, red jujube dates, etc.) Those from vines have a special quality to rid wind (grapes, raisins).

- Seeds, nuts, and beans can be used to calm the *shen*/spirit and anchor the qi. Nut or seed milks (homemade is best) can be used: almond, hemp, oat, hazelnut, etc. Nuts like pistachios and seeds such as lotus that don't make great "milks" can be eaten as snack foods or added to congee.

- Shellfish such as clams, abalone, or dried scallops can be added to congee for an animal influence to anchor and calm the *shen*/spirit.

Some Recipes

For breakfast, include oatmeal with blueberries and cinnamon. Wet breakfasts nourish yin and build fluids, essential for correcting the vacuity or deficiencies that allow wind to enter the channels. Oats are anchoring (descending the qi) while also helping clear food stagnation. Blueberries help build blood. Cinnamon opens the exterior. Use thick rolled oats or steel cut oats, cooked with plenty of water; avoid instant or quick-cooking oats.

For dinner appetizers, have plenty of olives on hand, eat them freely. Have artichokes, asparagus, pistachios, and almonds, too, but avoid breads and cheeses.

For dinner, cook to support the strategies described above. Several of the principles discussed are included in a fish soup with fermented vegetables, along with a vegetable side dish. The overall strategy is to nourish yin, improve digestion, resolve heat, and clear wind.

White Fish and Kimchi Soup

kombu - 1 piece
 dried black mushrooms - 4-6
 carrot - 2 medium
 zucchini - 2 medium
 pale kimchi - 1 cup (sauerkraut makes a good substitute)
 white fish fillets - 1 pound
 scallions - 4
 tamari - 2 Tbsp
 toasted sesame oil - 1 tsp
 lime - 1 for juice
 cilantro - a small handful
 water - 6 cups

Make a quick kombu-mushroom stock by bringing 6 cups water to a boil with the strip of kombu and the black mushrooms (poke the mushrooms into the water to ensure they soften). Reduce to a simmer. After 10-15 minutes, remove the kombu (serve in another dish or discard). Remove the mushrooms to a cutting board; after they cool enough, cut off their stems (they will never soften), slice the caps and return those slices to the pot.

Cut the carrots into thick sticks (cut a section about an inch and a half long, then slice that into half and each half into half) then add the carrot slices to the pot. After five minutes, add the zucchini, similarly cut.

On a cutting board, chop the kimchi into smaller pieces. Use the pale Napa cabbage kimchi without chili spice or too much garlic. If the kimchi is "old", meaning long-fermented, it will be more sour (this is best). Temper the sourness slightly by sautéing briefly in a separate pan. Add the kimchi to the pot. Add also some kimchi juice, perhaps 1/2 cup, if available. Taste the broth, adjust for salt if needed.

Slice the fish fillets into 2-inch pieces (as you like) and add to the pot. As soon as they are cooked (no more than 4-5 minutes), add the tamari, toasted sesame oil, and coarsely chopped cilantro. Serve with a wedge of fresh lime to squeeze over the soup, as desired.

Serve with a side dish of steamed white rice with touch of

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spicy daikon kimchi to open exterior and stimulate diaphoresis. Serves four.

Snow Peas with Mung Sprouts and Shiso

snow peas - 2 cups
mung bean sprouts - 1 cup
grapeseed oil - 1-2 Tbsp
scallions - 4
fresh ginger - 3 slices, slivered
sea salt - small pinch
tamari - 1 Tbsp
sesame seeds - 1 tsp
shiso - 2 leaves per person, fresh or dried

Rinse and trim the snow peas. Rinse the mung sprouts. Trim and coarsely chop the scallions.

Blanch the snow peas in boiling water for 2-3 minutes, then remove with a strainer. Blanch the beansprouts in the same water for only 1 minute, and drain well.

Meanwhile, in a wide, hot pan, add the oil, the scallions and the slivered fresh ginger. Add the beansprouts and the snow peas. Add the pinch of salt and the splash of tamari. Sliver the shiso and spread around the pan just before serving (use fresh mint if shiso is unavailable). Serve as soon as very hot, with a sprinkling of sesame seeds as the dish is coming to the table. Serves four.

For dessert, when desired, have yogurt and almonds with sliced figs and fresh mint leaves. Yogurt is the most easily digested dairy food. With the fermented note, good yogurt supports *ying* and *wei*, helps the gallbladder and the length of the intestines. Almonds help to regulate lung qi while aiding peristalsis through descending qi. Mint is a key herb in Disperse Wind Powder/Xiao Feng San. Rather than debating the relative efficacy of mint and its cousin shiso, use both in the kitchen often. Sliver or chiffonade the mint and blend it into the yogurt. Add sliced dried figs for a sweet note, a fruit that descends qi and helps to clear the intestines.

Conclusion

In a sweeping summary of the cause of human illness, chapter 60 of the *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* states that one hundred diseases arise from wind. Beyond the clinical aspects of disease management, the Yellow Emperor is saying that illnesses arise when we are unable to adapt to the challenges of change. Change is the constant, resistance is the stress. All around we see our attempts to deny the complex flowing of change. We build solid buildings and dam rivers, we make laws and institutions, we agree to contracts in business and make vows in order to structure families. We do everything we can to make things as permanent as possible.

But permanence is never possible. As Buddha taught so eloquently, our minds constantly and thoroughly mistake all things as fixed, including our own sense of ourselves. As change inexorably exerts its power, we feel betrayed. Rather than relax into life's flow, we raise our *wei* qi and exhaust our resources as we try to defend from what can't be stopped, day in and out. It is when our individual stresses deplete our internal resources that

we can become susceptible to the symptoms of wind. Wind is, above all, a disturbance. Wind enters through our weakened defenses like thieves sneaking into our homes. Sometimes the "thieves" leave quickly and our treasured health recovers, other times they get trapped inside or even arise entirely within--causing all kinds of trouble as they move from one hiding place to another in order to avoid detection.

When we take the very opening of the *Nei Jing* to heart, calm our hearts and do not allow striving or sadness to steal our essential joyfulness, and when our diet is well-chosen and well-digested so that our resources are full and free of stagnation, we can walk through the changes that life brings as well as the outdoor climatic winds with stability, buoyancy, and grace.

Andrew Stermán is the author of *Welcoming Food, Diet as Medicine for the Home Cook and Other Healers*. The two volumes of *Welcoming Food* offer a unique entry into understanding the energetics of food, explain how foods work in common sense language and provide easy-to-follow recipes for everyday eating. Andrew teaches food energetics classes and sees private clients for dietary therapy and medical qigong in New York City. He has studied broadly in holistic cooking, meditation, and tai chi, and for twenty years has been a student of Daoist Master Jeffrey Yuen in herbal medicine, qigong, and of course, dietary therapy from the classical Chinese medicine tradition.

Visit Andrew at andrewsterman.com/food

Both books are available for sale at www.gfcherbs.com.

