Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) & Chinese Herbal Medicine

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Fibromyalgia, also called fibromyalgia syndrome or FMS, is a condition mostly affecting women between 20-50 years of age. It is characterized by chronic, widespread, severe muscular aching, pain, and stiffness accompanied by insomnia, fatigue, and depression. Unlike osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and lupus erythematosus, it is neither a rheumatic, inflammatory, progressive, or degenerative disorder. However, it is also not solely a psychosomatic or psychiatric disorder. It is a chronic, debilitating condition of unknown etiology or cause which is probably caused by a number of different factors involving a complex relationship between the psyche (the mind) and the soma (the body).

**Chinese medical disease categorization:** In Chinese medicine, the generalized body pain of fibromyalgia is categorized as ji bi or muscle impediment. However, most of the complaints associated with fibromyalgia syndrome are disease categories in Chinese medicine in their own right. Therefore, when treating FMS, one should consider the patterns and treatments for these other Chinese disease categories. FMS's three main associated disease conditions besides fibromyalgia per se are xu lao, vacancy taxation, yu zheng, depressive condition, and shi mian, insomnia.

**Chinese medical disease causes & mechanisms:** In terms of the Chinese medical disease causes of FMS, these include external contraction of the six environmental excesses, internal damage by the seven affects, unregulated eating and drinking, iatrogenesis, and aging. In my experience, the core disease mechanism at work in fibromyalgia syndrome is a liver-spleen disharmony. Liver depression qi stagnation may be due to unfulfilled desires or anger damaging the liver. However, it may also be due to insufficient blood nourishing the liver or insufficient yang warming and steaming the liver. Spleen vacancy is due to either faulty diet, excessive taxation, excessive thinking and especially worry and anxiety, too little physical exercise, overuse of bitter, cold medicinals, including Western antibiotics, living in a damp, hot environment, and liver wood assaulting spleen earth. If the liver becomes depressed, the qi and, therefore, blood and body fluids all will not flow smoothly and easily as they should. Liver qi symptoms include chest, breast, rib-side, and abdominal oppression, distention, fullness, and pain, emotional depression, irritability, headaches, PMS, and dysmenorrhea. Spleen qi vacancy symptoms include fatigue, lack of strength and/or warmth in the extremities, poor appetite, and loose stools. Damp accumulation symptoms include edema, abnormal vaginal discharge, damp skin lesions, and damp impediment. If dampness congeals into phlegm, there may be phlegm nodulation, phlegm in the lungs, or phlegm harassing and disquieting the heart spirit. Blood stasis may result in painful menstruation or any fixed location pain in the body.

Based on this core disease mechanism of liver-spleen disharmony, numerous other disease mechanisms may also be engendered. Since the defensive qi issues from the middle burner, spleen qi vacancy leads to defensive qi not securing with easy invasion of external evils. If spleen vacancy fails to transform and engender sufficient new blood, there will be heart and/or liver blood vacancy. If blood vacancy endures, it may give rise to yin vacancy, internal stirring of wind, worsening of liver depression, or blood stasis. If spleen vacancy endures, it may eventually reach the kidneys, damaging yang. In that case, there will be a spleen-kidney yang vacancy and vacancy cold which may constrict and congeal the blood, hence also causing blood stasis. In addition, if both the spleen and kidney yang are vacuous and weak, water metabolism must be even more negatively affected. If liver depression worsens or endures, qi depression may transform heat. This may give rise to liver fire flaming upward or ascendant liver yang hyperactivity. Heat in the liver may mutually engender heat in the stomach, spleen, heart, lungs, bladder, and/or blood. If heat endures it will damage and consume yin fluids. Further, when heat flares upward, it harasses the spirit and the clear orifices above. According to Li Dong-yuan, when heat flares upward from the lower and middle burners, it also consumes and damages the spleen qi. If dampness due to spleen vacancy and faulty diet unites with or engenders depressive heat, damp heat may pour downward, to the bladder, uterus, and lower limbs. It may also spill over into the space between the muscles and the skin. Damp heat pouring downward may damage liver and kidney yin at the same time as it stirs ministerial fire to flare upward. All of the signs and symptoms of FMS are due to some combination of these inter-related disease mechanisms.

**Treatment Based on Pattern Discrimination:**

1. Liver-spleen disharmony pattern

   **Main symptoms:** Irritability, mental-emotional depression, constipation with thin, ribbon-like or small round stools or diarrhea alternating with constipation, burping and belching, chest, rib-side and abdominal distention or pain, premenstrual breast distention and pain, painful menstruation, fatigue, loss of strength in the extremities, reduced food intake, stomach and epigastric distention and fullness after eating, superficial edema, cold hands and feet, easy bruising, heavy menstruation or abnormal uterine bleeding, dizziness upon standing up, a pale facial complexion, a fat, pale yet dark tongue with thin, white fur, and a bowstring, fine pulse which is often soggy in the right bar position

   **Note:** Although this pattern is the core of FMS, there usually must be at least one other disease mechanism before a patient exhibits FMS. By itself, this pattern does not correspond to FMS.
However, we have presented it here to emphasize that this disease mechanism sits squarely in the center of all the other patterns which do describe various clinical aspects of FMS.

**Treatment principles:** Course the liver and rectify the qi, fortify the spleen and boost the qi.

**Rx:** Xiao Yao San (Rambling Powder): Radix Albus Paeoniae Lactiflorae (Bai Shao), 18g, Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu), Sclerotium Poriae Cocos (Fu Ling), Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), 9g each, Herba Menthae Haplocalycis (Bo He) and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g each, and uncooked Rhizoma Zingiberis (Sheng Jiang), 2 slices.

**Additions & subtractions:** If spleen vacuity is marked with fatigue and lack of strength or if the defensive qi is not securing, add 15 grams of Radix Atragali Membranaceae (Huang Qi) and nine grams of Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen). If the qi is more pronounced dampness in the middle burner, add nine grams of Herba Agastachis Seu Pogostemi (Huo Xiang) and Fructus Amomi (Sha Ren). If dampness is spilling over into the extremities with puffy swelling, add nine grams each of Semen Plantaginis (Che Qian Zi) and Rhizoma Alismatis (Ze Xie). If there is phlegm dampness, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Pinelliae Tentacae (Ban Xia) and Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi). If generalized blood vacuity is pronounced and there is malnourishment of the sinews, add 15 grams of Caulis Millettiae Seu Spatholobi (Ji Xue Teng) and 12 grams of cooked Radix Rehmanniae (Shu Di). If there is more serious liver blood vacuity, add nine grams of Fructus Lycii Chinesis (Gou Qi Zi) and 12 grams of Radix Polygoni Multiflori (He Shou Wu). If heart blood is vacuous and the spirit is disquieted, add 12 grams each of Semen Zizyphi Spinosae (Suan Zao Ren) and Semen Biotae Orientalis (Bai Zi Ren). If liver depression has transformed heat and that heat has entered the blood division, add nine grams each of Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis (Zhi Zi) and Cortex Radicis Moutan (Dan Pi). If there is heat specifically in the liver-gallbladder, lungs, stomach, and intestines, add nine grams each of Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis (Huang Qin). If there is heat specifically in the liver-gallbladder, heart, stomach, and intestines, add 3-9 grams of Rhizoma Coptidis Chinesis (Huang Lian). If enduring heat has damaged stomach and/or lung fluids, add 12 grams of Tuber Ophiopogonis Japonici (Mai Men Dong). For more serious qi stagnation, add nine grams each of one or more of the following depending on the location, severity, and symptoms of qi stagnation: Rhizoma Cypri Rotundji (Xiang Fu), Radix Aucklandiae Lappae (Mu Xiang), Radix Linderae Strychnifoliaceae (Wu Yao), Fructus Citri Aurantii (Zhi Ke), Fructus Immaturus Citri Aurantii (Zhi Shi), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae Viride (Qing Pi), Semen Citri Reticulatae (Ju He), and Folium Citri Reticulatae (Ju Ye). If there is blood stasis, add nine grams each of Semen Pruni Persicae (Tao Ren) and Flos Carthami Tintori (Hong Hua). If there is painful diarrhea, add nine grams of Radix Ledebouriellae Divaricatae (Fang Feng) and six grams of Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi).

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**FMS & Chinese Medicine**

2. Damp heat pattern

**Main symptoms:** Loose stools or diarrhea, possibly dark, green-colored stools or light, yellow, mustard-colored stools, a burning or acid feeling around the anus with or after defecation, foul-smelling stools, hot, possibly red, possibly swollen, painful limbs, red, hot, swollen, wet, or weeping skin lesions, hot, frequent, burning, and/or painful urination, red, hot swollen, wet or weeping external genitalia, thick white, curdy or creamy yellow abnormal vaginal discharge, yellow-green nasal mucus, slimy, yellow tongue fur, and a slippery, rapid pulse.

**Note:** Damp heat complicates most if not all cases of FMS. However, it is usually not the main pattern but rather complicates other patterns such as liver-spleen disharmony, qi and Yin vacuity, and Yin and Yang vacuity. Damp heat manifests somewhat differently depending in which part of the body it is lodged. Areas of the body commonly affected by damp heat include the reproductive tract and external genitalia, the urinary tract, the digestive tract, the lower limbs, and the skin. Patients with damp heat typically exhibit that damp heat in two or more of these areas but rarely in all of them at the same time. It is common for damp heat to migrate from system to system within the body, some times manifesting as urinary tract damp heat, other times as gastrointestinal damp heat, and yet other times as dermatological damp heat. When damp heat causes impediment pain, this is also often called wind damp heat impediment. Because the heat of damp heat tends to waft upwards, damp heat below can also give rise to signs and symptoms of dry heat above, such as heat in the heart or dry mouth and throat and chapped lips.

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Treatment principles: Clear heat and eliminate dampness. Rx: For damp heat in the stomach and intestines, Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang (Pinelliae Drain the Heart Decoction): Rhizoma Pinelliae Terranae (Ban Xia), 12g, Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen) and Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis (Huang Qin), 9g each, dry Rhizoma Zingiberis (Gan Jiang) and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), Rhizoma Coptidis Chinensis (Huang Lian), 3g, and Fructus Zizyphi Jujubae (Da Zao), 3 pieces.

Additions & Subtractions: For marked fatigue, add 18 grams of Radix Astragali Membranacei (Huang Qi). For diarrhea, add 18 grams of Radix Pueraiae (Ge Gen).

For damp heat impediment, Si Miao San Jia Wei (Four Wonders Powder with Added Flavors): uncooked Semen Cacilachryma-jobi (Yi Yi Ren), 21g, Radix Achyranthis Bidentatae (Ni Xu), 15g, and Rhizoma Atractylodis (Cao Zhu), Cortex Phellodendri (Huang Bai), and Fructus Chaenomelis Lagenariae (Mu Gua), 9g each.

Additions & Subtractions: For predominant dampness, add nine grams each of Sceletium Poriae Cocos (Fu Ling) and Rhizoma Alismatis (Zhe Xie). For damp heat in the bladder, Ba Zheng San (Eight Correcting [Ingredients] Powder) plus Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) with additions & subtractions: Talcum (Hu Shu), 18g, Sclerotium Poriae Cocos (Fu Ling) and Semen Plantaginis (Che Qian Zi) 12g each, Herba Dianthi (Qu Mai), Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis (Zhi Zi), Herba Polygony Aviculare (Bian Xu), Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis (Huang Qin), ginger stir-fried Rhizoma Pinelliae Terranae (Ban Xia), and Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen), 9g each, and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g.

For damp heat in the uterus with abnormal vaginal discharge, Er Huang San Bai Wan-Jia Jian (Two Yellows & Three Whites Pills with Additions & Subtractions): Rhizoma Atractyloides Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu), Radix Albus Paeonii Lactiflorae (Bai Shao), Hallysosorum Rubrum (Chi Shi Zhi), Radix Astragali Membranacei (Huang Qi), and Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), 9g each, Cortex Phellodendri (Huang Bai), Rhizoma Atractyloides (Cang Zhu), Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), and Cortex Tonaee Sinensis (Chun Gen Pi), 6g each, and Rhizoma Coptidis Chinensis (Huang Lian) and Rhiza Cuminum Cucubatae (Sheng Ma), 3g each.

For damp heat in the external genitalia with itching, Yi Huang Tong Jia Jian (Change the Yellow Decoction with Additions & Subtractions): Cortex Phellodendri (Huang Bai), Radix Sophorae Flavescentis (Ku Shen), Semen Plantaginis (Che Qian Zi), Radix Dioscoreae Oppositae (Shan Yao), Semen Euryalidis Fericis (Qian Shi), Semen Cociliachryma-jobi (Yi Yi Ren), Sclerotium Poriae Cocos (Fu Ling), Cortex Radicis Dictamni Dasyacarpi (Bai Xian Pi), Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), Flos Lonicerae Japonicae (Jin Yin Hua), and Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen), 9g each, and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 3g.

For damp heat in the yang ming causing acne, "Yin Chen Hua Tang" (Artemisia Decoction) plus Ban Xia Xie Xing Tang (Pinelliae Drain the Heart Decoction) plus Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) with additions & subtractions: Herba Artemisiae Capillaris (Yin Chen Hua) and Flos Lonicerae Japonicae (Jin Yin Hua), 15g each; Flos Chrysanthemum Indici (Ye Ju Hua), Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis (Zhi Zi), Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis (Huang Qin), and Radix Rubruss

Paeoniae Lactiflorae (Chi Shao), 9g each, Rhizoma Pinelliae Terranae (Ban Xia), Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen), and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g each, and Rhizoma Coptidis Chinensis (Huang Lian), 3g.

3. Qi & yin vacuity with liver depression & fire effulgence pattern

Main symptoms: Fatigue, lack of strength, scanty qi, disinclination to speak, low back pain and knee soreness, night-time urination, frequent but scanty, darkish urination, loose stools, dizziness, tinnitus, matitudinal insomnia, night sweats, tidal heat, a pale face but malar flushing, cold hands and feet alternating with vexatious heat in the five hearts, a fat, pale tongue with red tip and scanty, possibly dry and/or yellowish fur, and a fine, rapid, or floating, surging, rapid pulse.

Treatment principles: Fortify the spleen and boost the qi, supplement the kidneys and enrich yin, clear heat and drain fire.

Rx: Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan Jia Jian (Heavenly Emperor Supplement the Heart Elixir with Additions & Subtractions): uncooked Radix Rehmanniae (Sheng Di) and Radix Astragali Membranacei (Huang Qi), 15g each, Radix Codonopsis Pilosulae (Dang Shen), Radix Scrophulariae Ningpoensis (Xuan Shen), Tubera Ophiopogonis Japonici (Mai Dong), and Tubera Asparagi Cochinsensis (Tian Men Dong), 12g, Fructus Schisandrae Chinensis (Wu Wei Zi), Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae (Dan Shen), Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), Scelerotium Poriae Cocos (Fu Ling), Radix Dioscoreae Oppositae (Shan Yao), Radix Polygalae Tenuifoliae (Yuan Zhi), Radix Albus Paeoniae Lactiflorae (Bai Shao), Semen Zizyphi Spinosae (Suan Zao Ren), and Fructus Meliae Toosendan (Chuan Lian Zi), 9g each, Radix Platycodi Grandiflori (Jie Geng) and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g each, and Rhizoma Coptidis Chinensis (Huang Lian), 3g.

Additions & Subtractions: For low back and knee soreness and pain, add nine grams each of Radix Achyranthis Bidentatae (Ni Xu), Cortex Eucommiae Ulmoidis (Du Zhong), and Ramulus Loranthi Seu Visci (Sang Ji Sheng). For night-time urination, add 12 grams each of Fructus Alpiniae Oxyphyllae (Yi Zhi Ren) and Fructus Rosae Laevigatae (Jin Yin Zhi). For frequent but scanty, darkish urination, add nine grams each of Sclerotium Polypori Umbellati (Zhu Ling) and Rhiza Alismatis (Ze Xie). For loose stools, add 12 grams of Rhizoma Atractyloides Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu). For dizziness, add 12 grams each of Radix Achyranthis Bidentatae (Ni Xu) and Fructus Lycii Chinensis (Gou Qi Zi) and Fructus Lycii Chinensis (Gou Qi Zi). For night sweats, add 12 grams each of Semen Bietiae Orientalis (Bai Zi Ren) and Semen Levis Triticum Aestivum (Fu Xiao Mai). If spleen vacuity is marked, increase the dosage of Huang Qi to up to 25 grams and add 12 grams of Rhizoma Atractyloides Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu). If there is more serious kidney yin vacuity, add 12 grams of cooked Radix Rehmanniae (Shu Di). If there is more serious liver blood vacuity, add nine grams of Fructus Lycii Chinensis (Gou Qi Zi) and 12 grams of Radix Polygyni Multiflori (He Show Wu). If heart blood is vacuous and the spirit is disquieted, add 12 grams each of Arillus Euphoriae Longanae (Long Yan Rou) and Semen Bietiae Orientalis (Bai Zi Ren). If liver depression has transformed heat, add nine grams each of Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis (Zhi Zi) and Cortex Radicis Moutan (Dan Pi). If there is blood stasis, add nine grams each of Semen Pruni Persicae (Tao Ren) and Flos Carthami Tinctorii (Hong Hua). If there is painful diarrhea, add
4. Spleen-kidney yang vacuity with liver depression pattern

Main symptoms: Fatigue, lack of strength, scanty qi, disinclination to speak, possible spontaneous perspiration, possible daybreak diarrhea but definitely a tendency to loose stools, low back and knee soreness and limpness, decreased sexual desire, frequent urination, nocturia, cold hands and feet alternating with vexatious heat in the five centers, tidal heat, a pale face but malar flushing, chest, abdominal, breast, rib-side oppression, distention, fullness, and pain, menstrual irregularities and especially a shortened luteal phase, possible dysmenorrhea, irritability, emotional depression, a pale but dry, fat, swollen tongue with thin, white or somewhat slimy fur, and a bowstring, fine, possibly deep, forceless pulse at least in the cubit positions.

Note: This pattern is a typical complication of FMS in perimenopausal women. It most commonly shows up after 40 years of age.

Treatment principles: Fortify the spleen and boost the qi, supplement the kidneys and invigorate yang, course the liver and rectify the qi.

Rx: Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang (Supplement the Center & Boost the Qi Decoction) & You Gui Yin (Restore the Right [Kidney] Drink) with additions and subtractions: Radix Astragali Membranaceae (Huang Qi), 15g, Semen Cuscutae Chenisnus (Tu Si Zi) and Radix Dioscoreae Opposita (Shan Yao), 12g each, cooked Radix Rehmanniae (She Shu), Cortex Eucommiae Ulmoides (Du Zhong), Fructus Lycii Chenisnus (Gou Qi Zi), Fructus Corni Officinalis (Shan Zhu Yu), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu), and Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), 9g each, and Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi) and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g each, and Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), 1.5-3g.

Additions & subtractions: If there is blood vacuity failing to nourish the sinew vessels, add 15 grams each of Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae (Dan Shen) and Caulis Millettiae Seu Spatholobi (Ji Xue Teng). For severe fatigue, add 12 grams of Radix Codonopis Pilosae (Dang Shen) and increase the dosage of Huang Qi up to 30g. For daybreak diarrhea, add nine grams of Fructus Schisandrae Chenisnus (Wu Wei Zi), six grams of Semen Myristicae Fragrans (Rou Dou Kou), and three grams of Fructus Evodiae Rutaceae (Wu Zhu Yu). For decreased sexual desire, add nine grams each of Herba Epimedii (Yin Yang Huo) and Rhizoma Curculiginis Orchidii (Xian Mao). For frequent urination and nocturia, add 12 grams each of Fructus Alpiniae Oxypyllyae (Yi Zhi Ren) and Fructus Rosae Laevigatae (Jin Yin Zi). For chest, abdominal, breast, and rib-side oppression, distention, fullness, and pain due to liver depression, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundii (Xiang Fu), Radix Aucklandiae Lappae (Mu Xiang), and Tuber Curcumae (Yu Jin). For menstrual irregularities, dysmenorrhea, and PMS, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundii (Xiang Fu) and Radix Ligustici Wallichii (Chuan Xiong).

5. Spleen qi and yin & yang vacuity with vacuity heat and liver depression

Main symptoms: Fatigue, lack of strength, scanty qi, disinclination to speak, possible spontaneous perspiration and/or night sweat, loose stools or constipation, low back and knee soreness and limpness, decreased sexual desire, frequent urination, nocturia, cold hands and feet alternating with vexatious heat in the five centers, tidal heat, a pale face but malar flushing, chest, abdominal, breast, rib-side oppression, distention, fullness, and pain, menstrual irregularities and especially a shortened luteal phase, possible dysmenorrhea, irritability, emotional depression, a tender, swollen, red tongue with teeth-marks on its edges and scanty, possibly yellow fur, and a bowstring, fine, rapid pulse which is possibly deep and forceless at least in the right cubit position.

Treatment principles: Fortify the spleen and boost the qi, supplement the kidneys and invigorate yang, enrich yin and clear heat, course the liver and rectify the qi.

Rx: Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang (Supplement the Center & Boost the Qi Decoction) & Er Xian Tang (Two Immortals Decoction) with additions and subtractions: Radix Astragali Membranaceae (Huang Qi), 15g, Radix Codonopis Pilosae (Dang Shen), Cortex Phellodendri (Huang Bai), Rhizoma Anemarrhenae Asphodeloidis (Zhi Mu), Herba Epimedii (Xian Ling Pi), Rhizoma Curculiginis Orchidii (Xian Mao), Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), Rhizoma Atractylodis Macrocephalae (Bai Zhu), and Fructus Meliae Toosendan (Chuan Lian Zi), 9g each, Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae (Chen Pi) and mix-fried Radix Glycyrrhizae (Gan Cao), 6g each, and Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), 1.5-3g.

Additions & subtractions: Add 21 grams of Fructus Levistritici Aestivae (Fu Xiao Mai) and 12 grams of Concha Ostreae (Mu Li) if there are night sweats and hot flashes. Add 12 grams each of Semen Zizyphi Spinossae (Suan Zao Ren) and Cortex Albizziae Julibrissinidis (He Huan Pi) if there is insomnia. Add 15 grams each of Caulis Millettiae Seu Spatholobi (Ji Xue Teng), Radix Achyranthis Bidentatae (Niu Xi), and Cortex Radicis Acanthopanicis Gracilistis (Wu Jia Pi) for malnourished sinews and body pain. Add 15 grams each of Radix Scrophulariae Ningpoensis (Xuan Shen) and Spica Prunellae Vulgaris (Xiu Ku Cao), 12 grams each of Concha Ostreae (Mu Li), Semen Citri Reticulatae (Ju He), and Fructus Akebiae Trifoliatae (Ba Yue Zha), and nine grams each of Rhizoma Pinelliae Sternatae (Ban Xia), Herba Saragassai (Hai Zao), Bulbus Fritillariae Thunbergii (Zhe Bei Mu), and Squamae Manitis Pentactadiastis (Chuan Shan Jia) for fibrocystic breasts. For constipation, add six grams of Fructus Immaturus Citri Auranti (Zhi Shi) and/or three grams of Radix Et Rhizoma Rhei (Da Huang). For daybreak diarrhea,
add nine grams of Fructus Schisandrae Chinensis (Wu Wei Zi), six grams of Semen Myristicae Fragrantiss (Rou Dou Kou), and three grams of Fructus Evodiae Reticulatae (Wu Zhu Yu). For decreased sexual desire, add nine grams of Herba Cistanchis Deserticola (Rou Cong Rong). For frequent urination and nocturia, add 12 grams each of Fructus Alpiniae Oxyphyllae (Yi Zhi Ren) and Fructus Rosae Laevigatae (Jin Ying Zi). For chest, abdominal, breast, and rib-side oppression, distention, fullness, and pain due to liver depression, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundae Xiang Fu), Radix Aucklandiae Lappae (Mu Xiang), and Tuber Curcumaee (Yi Jin). For menstrual irregularities, dysmenorrhea, and PMS, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundae (Xiang Fu) and Radix Ligustici Wallii (Chuan Xiong). For more marked kidney yin vacuity, add nine grams each of Radix Polygoni Multiflori (He Shou Wu), Fructus Ligustri Lucidi (Nu Zhen Zi), and Herba Ecliptae Prostratae (Han Lian Cao).

6. Blood stasis pattern

Main symptoms: Fixed, sharp, stabbing and/or severe pain which is commonly worse in the evening and at night, engorged visible blood vessels, from large varicosities to spider nevi and cherry hemangiomas, engorged and distended sublingual veins, painful menstruation, blood clots in the menstruate, blood clots in any visible bleeding, a dark, sooty facial complexion, liver or age spots, a dark, possibly purplish tongue or static spots or black and blue marks on the tongue, and a bowstring, choppy, deep, and/or irregular pulse.

Note: This pattern only complicates other of the above patterns based on the saying, “New diseases are in the channels, and old diseases are in the network vessels.”

Treatment principles: quicken the blood and transform stasis, free the flow of the network vessels and stop pain.

Rx: Shen Tong Zhu Yu Tang (Body Pain Dispelling Stasis Decoction): Semen Prunii Persicae (Tao Ren), Flos Carthami Tintorii (Hong Hua), Radix Angelicae Sinensis (Dang Gui), and Radix Cyathulae (Chuan Niu Xi), 9g each, Radix Ligustici Wallii (Chuan Xiong), Radix Et Rhizoma Notopterygii (Qiang Huo), Radix Gentianae Macrophyllae (Qin Jiao), Feces Trogotroctorii (Mu Ling Zhi), Lumburicis (Di Long), Resina Myrrhae (Mo Yao), and Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundae (Xiang Fu), 9g each, and Radix Glycyrrhizaee (Gan Cao), 3g.

Additions & Subtractions: If there is low back pain, add nine grams each of Cortex Eucommiae Ulmoides (Du Zhong) and Radix Morindae Officinalis (Ba Ji Tian). If there is concomitant qi vacuity with marked fatigue and lack of strength, add 15 grams of Radix Astragali Membranacei (Huang Qi) and nine grams of Radix Codonopsis Piloseulae (Dang Shen). If there is accompanying dampness and heat, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Atractyloidis (Gang Zhu) and Cortex Phellodendri (Huang Bai). If there is simultaneous blood vacuity, add 15 grams each of Radix Polygoni Multiflori (He Shou Wu) and Caulis Milletiae Seu Spatholobi (Ji Xue Teng).

7. Phlegm nodulation pattern

Main symptoms: Swollen lymph nodes, fibrocystic lumps in the breast, other hard, round, subcutaneous lumps and bumps.

Note: Like static blood above, this pattern only complicates other patterns of FMS.

Treatment principles: Transform phlegm and scatter nodulation.

Rx: Xiao Luo Wan (Disperse Scrofula Pills) & Er Chen Tang (Two Aged Ingredients) with added flavors: Radix Scrophulariae Ningpoensis (Xuan Shen), Spica Prunellae Vulgaris (Xia Ku Cao), and Bulbus Fritillariae Ningpoensis (Zhe Bei Mu), each 15g. For chest, abdominal, breast, and rib-side oppression, distention, fullness, and pain due to liver depression, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundae (Xiang Fu), Radix Aucklandiae Lappae (Mu Xiang), and Tuber Curcumaee (Yi Jin). For menstrual irregularities, dysmenorrhea, and PMS, add nine grams each of Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundae (Xiang Fu) and Radix Ligustici Wallii (Chuan Xiong). For more marked kidney yin vacuity, add nine grams each of Radix Polygoni Multiflori (He Shou Wu), Fructus Ligustri Lucidi (Nu Zhen Zi), and Herba Ecliptae Prostratae (Han Lian Cao).

Additions & Subtractions: For liver depression qi stagnation, add 9 grams each of Radix Bupleuri (Chai Hu), Radix Albus Paeoniae Lactiflorae (Bai Shao), and Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae Viride (Zing Po) for phlegm heat with thirst, add 9 grams of Radix Trichosanthis Kirilowii (Tian Hu Fen).

Remarks

1. As stated above, the core disease mechanism of FMS is a liver-spleen disharmony. This typically evolves into qi and yin vacuity and liver depression due to either body type or age, remembering that, “Yin is half consumed by 40 years of age.” Likewise, it typically evolves into spleen-kidney yang vacuity with liver depression also due to age, this pattern being very common in Western perimenopausal women. Because yin and yang are mutually rooted, yin and yang vacuity with liver depression is also commonly seen.

2. When treating FMS, primary attention should be given to insomnia. Much of the body pain tends to disappear on its own if the patient’s sleep can be improved. Insomnia may be due to yin and blood vacuity failing to nourish and quiet the spirit or the upward flaring of heat harassing the spirit. Most often it is due to a combination of both these mechanisms.

If the patient reports that she wakes in the middle of the night in a fright, startles easily, has heart palpitations, experiences phlegm in the back of her throat, and has a bowstring, slippery pulse this is gallbladder qi timidity or heart-gallbladder qi vacuity. Gallbladder qi timidity is shorthand for spleen vacuity engendering phlegm, liver depression qi stagnation, and phlegm harassing the heart. Heart-gallbladder qi vacuity is shorthand for worse qi vacuity now causing heart qi vacuity, heart blood vacuity, liver depression, and phlegm. Either of these two patterns may be complicated by depressive heat harassing the heart spirit. Wen Dan Tang (Warm the Gallbladder Decoction) is the usual guiding formula for gallbladder qi timidity, while Shi Wei Wen Dan Tang (Ten Flavors Warm the Gallbladder Decoction) is the formula for heart-gallbladder qi vacuity. If there is depressive heat, then Rhizoma Coptidis Chinensis (Huang Lian) may be added to either formula in order to clear heat from the heart.

3. When blood stasis or phlegm complicate any of the above patterns, medicinals should be added to those protocols which quicken the blood and transform stasis or transform phlegm. If there is phlegm nodulation, the treatment principles of softening the hard and scattering nodulation are also used.