

Chinese Medicine Newsletter – Late Summer 2010

Welcome. Before the summer ends, there is a relevant and important topic that I want to briefly address. It is Lyme disease. Over the years I have treated people who have contracted Lyme. It can be very debilitating and seems to be significantly on the rise. It is something that, when treated immediately upon exposure with antibiotics, can be resolved most of the time. However, sometimes even with prompt antibiotic treatment, it can require other interventions to eradicate it completely.

Even more insidious are the cases in which people have been unknowingly infected for years. Many have been falsely diagnosed with an array of other illnesses, including fibromyalgia, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, etc. These people usually require other treatment along with extensive antibiotics in order to address their complex and compromised situation.

This is where Chinese Medicine can be very useful, as it can many times help address aspects of Lyme disease that can be very challenging for conventional treatment. Also, acupuncture and herbs can play an important role in treating the effects of co-infections that can be transmitted by the tick along with Lyme. A recent study indicates that the effectiveness of antibiotic therapy is enhanced with the addition of certain herbs.

Lyme is a bacterial infection. It is a spirochete, similar to syphilis. This makes it more difficult to treat if not resolved at the outset. It is mostly contracted through the bite of the deer tick, which is very small and difficult to see. Normally a bull's eye rash appears around the site of the bite. It can appear after a couple of days or even weeks after the bite. However, fewer than half the people who contract Lyme develop a rash or remember a tick bite.

There is consensus among many health professionals that there is no reliable test for Lyme disease at this time. Diagnosis is based on symptoms, medical history and exposure to ticks. Given the potential severity of long term untreated Lyme, if there is reasonable suspicion of its presence, it is prudent to start a course of treatment.

The Lyme spirochete can go anywhere in the body. Over time it can go to places like joints, where, due to reduced blood supply, make it more difficult for antibiotics to reach. It can even get to the brain, also compromising the effectiveness of medicines which have trouble or cannot cross the blood/brain barrier.

The spirochete exists in a couple of different forms. That is one reason it can be so stubborn and difficult to treat. One form is active and produces symptoms. In this form it can hide in cells, guarding it from drugs and the immune system. Another is the cyst form which does not cause symptoms, but which can spawn several spirochetes which then can be released into the system as the active form. They also produce what are called "biofilms." These are protective coatings that are difficult to penetrate with medications. These biofilms can also attract and harbor other bacteria as well, creating more havoc in the system.

Other tick borne illnesses are often contracted at the same time. These are the co-infections that I mentioned earlier. Two common ones are bartonella, another bacterial agent, and babesiosis, which is caused by a protozoan parasite, thus requiring other treatment besides antibiotics. There is not time to

go into these in more detail, but each has unique characteristics that require varied treatment strategies.

The use of Chinese Medicine can be very important in addressing some of the aspects that are not affected or reached by conventional drugs. For example, there are herbs that can penetrate biofilms, making them vulnerable to antibiotics which they would not be otherwise.

Garlic, for example, is a common herb that seems to cut through biofilms. Acupuncture enhances the immune response and promotes the flow of energy to address troublesome symptoms. Other herbs can help bind and eliminate toxins that are produced in the system by Lyme. These toxins which are released into the system are the cause of many of the debilitating symptoms.

Diet and lifestyle factors are very important in successfully addressing Lyme. There are specific dietary recommendations that are necessary so as to not feed the bacteria we are attempting to weaken and eliminate. In the more progressed stages of Lyme disease, a comprehensive protocol is necessary to address the complexity of the person's condition.

There are relatively few medical doctors who are well educated in the necessity for a comprehensive treatment protocol for Lyme disease. This includes antibiotic therapy, the use of herbs and other complementary treatments like acupuncture as well as educating patients about the crucial role of dietary and lifestyle factors.

Given how challenging the disease can be, the best treatment is prevention. Thoroughly check for ticks after outdoor activities, particularly if you have been in areas where deer reside or pass through. Hiking or walking through tall grasses or bush increases risk. If you suspect that you may have been exposed to Lyme, seek immediate treatment from a skilled practitioner.

If you have any questions or concerns about this for yourself, family members or friends, please feel free to contact me. (www.acupuncturefamilyhealth.com) (301) 530-7240.

Be well and enjoy the remaining weeks of summer.

Bob