

Internal heat from stagnant blood

by Zhou Xue-Hai

(from the *Du Yi Sui Bi* – Notes on Reading Medicine)
translated by Steve Clavey

WITHIN THE ABDOMEN there is often a subjective sensation of heat as if scalded — this is not related to the processes of qi transformation. It is not internal shi/excess heat, nor is it yin deficiency internal heat; rather it is caused by the stagnation of blood. The proof is that the mouth is not dry, but the water which is drunk is boiled away.

The fact is that the hottest thing in the body is none other than the blood. And why is this? Qi is by nature hot, and blood is the chamber of the qi, the heat goes with the territory. But the heat of the qi can dissipate without building up and so its flame is dispersed, while the heat of blood accumulates and is uniquely dense, having a burning broiling character. Fire is like a flame, but blood is like (burning) coal — are flames hotter than red hot coals? or are coals hotter than flames?

Thus a patient may feel a sudden (descending) heat as if drenched with hot soup, which is Heart deficiency and blood moving downwards; or they may feel a sensation like fire rushing upward from the chest or abdomen into the throat, which is Liver and Spleen oppression and rebellious qi carrying blood in its upward rush. Both of these remain in the normal movement pathways for blood, and this is why there is no tendency for (the heat) to dissipate towards the outside (of the body)

Similarly heat may be felt inside the ribs or in the chest like a warming fire, or around the heart area there may be a spicy pungent burning feeling, or a bursting distended feeling as if the skin has been broken, or a taste of blood in the throat — all of these are signs of stagnant blood accumulating in that local area.

The [stasis] can result from a recent illness with chills and fevers, or from drinking too much icy

water when thirsty, or from too much anger, or sudden or excessive use of strength, or failing to rest when exhausted, or repeated injury from food stagnation, or excessive consumption of deep-fried foods, and in women may of course result from menstrual irregularity.

Treatment must involve items that resolve stasis, such as *Tao Ren* (Persicae Semen) or *Hong Hua* (Carthami Flos) — the patient may spit up a blood clot, or pass black stool, and the problem is fixed.

If however the condition is mistakenly seen as excess fire, and cooling-clearing medicines are used, or seen as yin deficiency, and moistening-tonifying herbs applied, then the static blood will become even more fixed in place, and can become "dried blood syndrome" (*gan xue zheng*).

In the early stages of blood stasis, the pulse is usually wiry; if it is also strong and tidal (*hong*) the condition is easily cured, and it is also easily cured if the patient is thirsty, because in both cases these are signs of present vitality (*sheng qi*). If the pulse is short (*duan*, not filling its proper position) or the patient is not thirsty, the patient will be hard to treat: there is little vitality left.

Those feelings of sudden (descending) heat as if drenched with hot soup, or sensation like fire rushing upward from the chest or abdomen into the throat mean that although there is stasis, it is still mobile.

Those pungent spicy sensations, or the distended feeling as if the skin has been broken, both of which tend to be fixed in location, means that the blood has already clumped in the membranes and collaterals, and cannot move.

If the blood [stasis] is mobile, use cool stasis-transforming herbs, assisted by qi tonification. If blood has clumped, use warm stasis-transforming herbs, assisted by herbs that move the qi.

When the materia medicas say that *San Leng* (*Sparganii Rhizoma*) can dissolve the handle of a broadsword, they are emphasising the herb's ability to transform blood clots that have no qi [left moving within them].

■ Zhou Xue-Hai, 1856–1906, was a prolific writer and annotator of medical texts, particularly those influenced by the Song and Yuan experts. He was best known, however, for his studies on pulse, and his medical essays.