

# Severe throat infection in pregnancy

**By Steven Clavey**

**K.D., 25 years old. Presented 1/12/04.**

14 weeks pregnant. Severe throat infection over the last 3 days, preventing intake of solid food, and making it difficult for her to swallow even water. She has mucous in the back of the throat, and has been coughing up small amounts of blood.

Because of the pregnancy, her doctor is reluctant to give her antibiotics, but warned her that it may have to be risked if her condition does not improve rapidly. She wants to avoid antibiotics at all costs.

However, like her last pregnancy, she started vomiting in the second trimester rather than the first, and is continually nauseous at present. She has loose stool due to high doses of Vit. C she has taken over the last 3 days.

Pulse is strong and forceful at all levels (Shí mài). The tongue is reddish with a white coat.

**Diagnosis:** Wind heat painful obstruction of the throat (风热喉痹 *fēng rè hóu bì*).

**Discussion:** This is not 'sore throat of pregnancy' which – if defined precisely – is 'sore throat arising due to factors brought about by the pregnancy', such as yin deficiency, or internal heat. Here, she does have sore throat, and she

is pregnant, but the pregnancy did not bring about the sore throat, it merely complicates treatment.

In fact, the multiple factors complicating treatment are what make this case interesting.

Due to the pregnancy, herbs must be mild and safe. She has just begun vomiting with the pregnancy over the last two weeks, again restricting herb selection, as bad odours and tastes can make it difficult or impossible to stomach the decoction. Yet there is no doubt that pills or powders will not be strong enough or rapid enough to do the job; and furthermore solid pills hurt her throat. She also has diarrhea from the Vitamin C.

**Treatment:** There are three steps to the treatment:

1) Immediately let blood bilaterally at *Shaoshang* (LU-11): the thumb is rubbed from the base to the tip, concentrating the blood toward the point, which is swabbed, then using a sterile 3-edge needle, rapidly and forcefully prick the point, then continue to rub from the base to the tip in order to force out a large drop of blood. Repeat on the other thumb.

This will rapidly drain a measure of the pathogen from its concentration point in the throat, and quickly lessen the pain and swelling. However, the effect is occasionally less dramatic than desired, and usually temporary. Thus, to

■ Steve Clavey is a registered herbalist practising in Melbourne, Australia.

supplement this immediate effect, step two is adopted.

2) Give a single small dose of *Liushen Wan* (Six-Miracle Pill): these tiny pills are specific for swollen and severely sore throats causing difficulty swallowing. The usual dose is 10 pills, and they are generally contraindicated during pregnancy, however here the risk attending a single small dose is judged to be far outweighed by the risk of antibiotics to the pregnancy. 6 pills are given immediately after the blood-letting, as she waits for her prescription to be filled.

3) Upon returning home, immediately boil the following herbs in 3 cups of water for **15 minutes only**, set aside the results, add 2 cups of water then boil again for 15 minutes, and add the two results together. Take 100 mls 3 times a day.

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Ban Xia</i>          | 5g Pinelliae Rhizoma preparatum          |
| <i>Xing Ren</i>         | 5g Pruni Semen                           |
| <i>Ban Lan Gen</i>      | 5g Isatidis/Baphicacanthis Radix         |
| <i>Huang Qin</i>        | 5g Scutellariae Radix                    |
| <i>Lian Qiao</i>        | 5g Forsythiae Fructus                    |
| <i>Jin Yin Hua</i>      | 5g Lonicerae japonicae                   |
| <i>Chao Niu Bang Zi</i> | 5g Arctii Fructus, dry-fried and crushed |
| <i>Xuan Shen</i>        | 5g Scrophulariae, Radix                  |
| <i>Gan Cao</i>          | 3g Glycyrrhizae Radix                    |

#### Discussion:

This approach is based upon the dictum *Lightness can expel excess* (轻可祛实 *qīng kě qū shí*), a technique explored most fully by Yè Gùì (Yè Tiān-Shì). Not only are the dosages of the herbs light, but the cooking time is short, keeping the taste of the herbs bland and allowing the effects to reach upward into the throat and head. Prolonged cooking is most appropriate for effects that must reach deep into or low down in the body.

This approach also lessens the chance of the herbs being rejected by the stomach.

#### Explanation of herb selection:

*Ban Xia* and *Xing Ren* are acrid-dispersing and direct qi downward, breaking up phlegm accumulation and restoring normal descent of Lung qi which has been occluded in the throat by the pathogen.

*Ban Lan Gen* and *Huang Qin* are bitter-draining and cold. The combination of the acrid-dispersing and bitter-draining herbs allows the constraint of the pathogen in the throat to be loosened by dispersal, then drained away. *Ban Lan Gen* is specific for throat disorders.

*Lian Qiao* and *Jin Yin Hua* are both light-weight herbs that vent and disperse wind-heat

in the upper Jiao.

*Niu Bang Zi* and *Xuan Shen* are both specific for severe sore throat. *Niu Bang Zi* is more powerful for releasing the exterior, and is used in a dry-fried form here to reduce its tendency to cause loose stool – as the patient already has diarrhea due to her excessive Vit. C intake. *Xuan Shen* also has the potential to cause problems in this regards, but the light dosage and short cooking time ameliorate this somewhat.

Raw *Gan Cao*, while harmonising the effects of the other herbs, is itself cooling, antitoxic, and soothing to the throat.

*Ma Bo* (*Lasiosphaera/Calvatia*) was perfect for this case, but was unavailable.

**Results:** While waiting for the herbs to be dispensed, the patient reported that the throat already felt somewhat better. Upon follow-up the next day, she reported that she was “100 per cent” on the day before, and although the throat was still somewhat sore, she could now swallow at least soft foods and fluids.

Follow-up two weeks later: her sore throat cleared completely in two days: “faster than antibiotics would have worked, I think,” she said. Letting blood at *Shaoshang* (LU 11) had taken the edge off the pain, until she got home and could take the herbs, which she could feel working as soon as she took them. Interestingly, the nausea had also settled, and she had only vomited once in the two weeks since seeing her – instead of every day.