Hypochondriac Pain / Xié Tòng

Hypochondriac Pain/Xié Tòng refers to unilateral or bilateral pain in the lateral costal regions or it for costal regions. A subjective symptom, hypochondriac pain may be accompanied by distention and pain in the epigastrium or by palpable masses in the infracostal regions. The degree of pain differs from case to case; chronic cases generally exhibit dull or indistinct pain, while acute cases or severe medical conditions can exhibit excruciating pain.

Relevant Biomedical Conditions
- Cholecystitis
- Cholelithiasis
- Hepatitis
- Hepatospleno-megaly
- Gallbladder cancer
- Hepatic cancer
- Acute pancreatitis
- Chronic pancreatitis
- Pleurisy
- Intercostal neuralgia
- Costochondritis
- Costal trauma

Etiology and Pathology

Emotional Stress: emotional stress, particularly anger, frustration, and depression, is one of the major factors contributing to hypochondriac pain because it interferes with the Liver’s ability to direct the free flow of Qi.

Blood Stasis: Blood stasis may result from prolonged Liver Qi stagnation or from traumatic injury to the hypochondriac region, obstructing the Liver channel and causing pain.

External Damp-Heat or Improper Diet: external Damp-Heat invasion may obstruct the flow of Liver Qi causing pain. Additionally, Dampness may arise from improper diet injuring the Spleen; this Dampness over time may generate Heat and become Damp-Heat. Either scenario can result in Damp-Heat in the Liver, causing Liver Qi stagnation with pain.

Chronic illness, excessive sexual activity: these factors exhaust Yin/Essence and Blood, causing lack of nourishment to the Liver in its channels, resulting in pain.
Diagnosis

Exterior Patterns
- Acute
- Pain accompanied by aversion to cold and fever, nausea, vomiting, and jaundice
- Usually related to Damp-Heat attacking the Liver and Gallbladder

Interior Patterns
- Gradual onset
- No exterior symptoms

Cold Patterns
- Weak constitutions
- Cold intolerance, absence of thirst
- Pain relieved by warmth, aggravated by cold
- Pulse is slow, deep, choppy, or wiry

Heat Patterns
- Strong constitutions
- Red face, bitter taste in the mouth, thirst
- Pain relieved by cold, aggravated by warmth
- Pulse is rapid, abrupt, bounding, or wiry

Qi Stagnation
- Acute onset
- Pain is distending and migratory

Blood Stasis
- Related to prolonged illness (unless due to trauma)
- Pain is fixed, stabbing, and worse at night
- Tongue may be purple or show ecchymoses

Acupuncture and Moxibustion Treatment

Excess Patterns

Basic Points: LV14, TB6, GB34, LV3
Stagnation of Liver Qi: BL18, GB40, LI4
Stasis of Liver Blood: BL17, BL18, LI4, SP6, GB25, SP21
Damp Heat in the Liver & Gallbladder: GB24, SP9, GV14, ST36, CV12

Deficiency Patterns
Vacuity of Liver Yin: LV14, BL18, BL23, KI3, SP10, SP6

Clinical Tips
Clinically, patterns of Hypochondriac Pain/Xié Tòng are often complicated.
Excess and deficiency patterns may mutually transform: chronic Qi stagnation may lead to Blood Stasis; Blood Stasis or Damp-Heat accumulation can block the flow of Qi; any of the preceding factors can generate Heat which may injure Yin; deficiency may lead to Qi stagnation.

Liver Qi stagnation is the predominant pathogenesis for Hypochondriac Pain/Xié Tòng and can progress to other patterns. Herbs that soothe the Liver and regulate Qi are added to selected formulas to enhance the therapeutic effect. However, herbs that regulate the Qi are acrid and drying and may injure Liver Yin. Therefore, acrid and neutral Qi regulators are recommended.
TCM Pattern Differentiation

Stagnation of Liver Qi
Main Symptoms: Distending pain in the costal region that worsens with emotional stress
Additional Symptoms: Oppressive sensation in the chest, frequent sighing, bitter taste in the mouth, acid regurgitation, poor appetite, irritability, emotional depression, symptoms worse with emotional stress
Tongue: Thin, white coating
Pulse: Wiry
Treatment Principles: Soothe the Liver, regulate Qi, relieve pain
Acupuncture Treatment: Basic Points + BL18, GB40, LI4
Herbal Treatment: Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan (Bupleurum Liver-Coursing Powder)

Stasis of Liver Blood
Main Symptoms: Stabbing pain in the costal region that intensifies at night and with pressure
Additional Symptoms: possible mass under ribs
Tongue: Dark, purplish, purple spots
Pulse: Deep, wiry, choppy
Treatment Principles: Rectify Qi, dispel blood stasis, relieve pain
Acupuncture Treatment: Basic Points + BL17, BL18, LI4, SP6, GB25, SP21
Herbal Treatment: Ge Xia Zhu Yu Tang (Infradiaphragmatic Stasis-Expelling Decoction)

Damp Heat in the Liver and Gallbladder
Main Symptoms: Severe costal pain
Additional Symptoms: Bitter taste in the mouth, oppression in the chest, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, jaundice in some cases, dark urine
Tongue: Red
Pulse: Rapid, slippery
Treatment Principles: Clear heat, resolve damp, relieve pain
Acupuncture Treatment: Basic Points + GB24, SP9, GV14, ST36, CV12
Herbal Treatment: Long Dan Xie Gan Tang (Gentian Liver-Draining Decoction)

Vacuity of Liver Yin
Main Symptoms: Dull or indistinct costal pain which is aggravated by over exertion and alleviated by pressure
Additional Symptoms: Dizziness and vertigo, irritability, dry mouth and throat, thirst, restlessness, hot sensation in the chest, blurred vision
Tongue: Red, scanty coating
Pulse: Thin, wiry, rapid
Treatment Principles: Nourish Yin, soothe the Liver, relieve pain
Acupuncture Treatment: LV14, BL18, BL23, KI3, SP10, SP6
Herbal Treatment: Yi Guan Jian (All-the-way-through Brew)