



The Irritable Itch

Skin irritations can make life uncomfortable and can cause social embarrassment, particularly if the irritation presents itself on the hands or face. Conventional treatments like cortisone or other topical applications will often only bring temporary relief and don't treat the root cause of the issue. There are a plethora of skin conditions which people suffer from, the focus of this article is on three of the most common conditions; eczema, psoriasis and heat rashes. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), there are two key body patterns which can cause these skin irritations:

1. Heat & Dryness

Symptoms of *heat and dryness* can be easily detected and they include **dry skin, irritability**, and feeling **hot** and of **thirsty**. Key causes *internal heat* are **stress**, excessive intake of **alcohol** (particularly red wine) and **hot and spicy food**. If *internal heat* continues over a long period of time it will develop into *dryness* which represents a more chronic condition. The cause of skin irritations, when someone has *heat* or *dryness*, is the body attempting to vent *internal heat* through the skin. This venting process can cause irritation through the skin layers and often presents on the hands and scalp. The irritation can become more exacerbated if the skin is in frequent contact with cleansing agents. Obviously avoiding the influences mentioned above will be helpful in reducing *heat* and *dryness* skin irritations. However, once the condition takes hold, particularly psoriasis and eczema, the body may need some assistance in getting rid of these symptoms. **Acupuncture** treatments will reduce the *heat* particularly if the skin irritation is relatively new. **Chinese Herbs** may be needed to manage the issue, particularly if cause of the condition – often being stress - is an ongoing issue.

2. Blood Deficiency

In TCM *blood* is perceived differently to how we know it in Western medicine. It is not only the actual physical substance of blood but also includes all other body fluids. Blood has a close relationship with Qi (energy) and plays a key role in nourishing all aspects of the body including the internal organ system, muscles and skin (our largest organ).

If someone becomes very fatigued over a long period of time their Qi will become weakened and they may experience tiredness. If this situation becomes chronic or an event causes loss of *blood* such as heavy menstruation, childbirth or surgery, their blood may also become deficient. Common signs of *blood deficiency* are a **pale complexion, lack of concentration, dizziness** or scanty or irregular **menstruation**. . A common correlating Western medicine pattern is anaemia or iron deficiency. A *blood deficient* pattern is more likely to develop in females. If there is insufficient *blood* to nourish the skin, dry, itchy and flaky irritations can develop and will worsen with fatigue.

Diet is essential in strengthening the *blood*, particularly with our modern busy lives. Dense earthy vegetables especially **beetroot, eggplant and fennel** will strengthen the blood. Iron enriched proteins such as **eggs, chicken and red meat** are also very helpful. Remember to eat regular balanced meals and don't skip breakfast. If you starve yourself the deficiency will certainly worsen. Blood deficiency is a deeply manifested TCM body pattern. Diet and rest will assist in recovery. Chinese herbs will be the most practical and effective treatment to resolve the deficiency. Acupuncture will help but if solely relied on, an extensive amount of treatments are necessary. Herbal medicine can be taken home and used on a daily basis to create a quick and lasting change.