



Paediatric Eczema

Paediatric eczema can be a very distressing condition for both the suffering child and the whole family. Eczema can range from a slight annoyance with minor areas of the body being affected to large parts of the body and limbs being covered with an unbearable itchy rash. Eczema is most commonly managed with the application of topical creams and lotions, often steroidal, and often with poor or only temporary symptomatic relief. However the cause according to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), is due to an internal imbalance, which when treated appropriately can drastically reduce the annoying signs and symptoms if not eradicate the eczema all together.

Two common TCM paediatric eczema patterns

Lung deficiency

According to TCM the lungs and the respiratory process play a crucial role in providing the essential building blocks of Qi or energy. The lungs also control the TCM perspective of the body's defensive system necessary to prevent and fight colds and flues. If a baby or toddler catches frequent or persistent bugs the energy or Qi of the lungs can be drained and weakened. Thereby causing a lung Qi deficiency, which will reduce the strength and effectiveness of a child's immune system. This pattern may contribute to a heightened sensitivity leading to a propensity to allergic reactions. Eczema can commonly develop after an allergic reaction to something.

In TCM the lungs are connected to the skin, which helps explain why children who suffer from asthma or frequent colds can also develop eczema. This type of eczema is commonly present with a dry, scaly, itchy rash. It may worsen with fatigue and stress or after recovering from a cold, chest infection or asthma.

Accumulation Disorder

The first few years of life can have a big impact on the state of a child's health. It is common for an internal imbalance to be genetic or occur when we are babies or toddlers leading to various health problems. As toddlers start to eat solids the digestive system can become stressed or overworked. This may lead to undigested material in the gut leading to stagnation or blockage. In TCM this is known as "accumulation disorder" (AC). AC will usually lead to the development of "internal heat" and it represents an energy blockage. As the internal heat increases, the body will attempt to vent it. This is done largely through the skin and can exacerbate or create quite pronounced eczema, often affecting large areas of the body with very itchy and weeping skin lesions. This type of eczema is often worse after eating especially rich, greasy and fatty foods.

Treatment

There are three key elements of treatment for paediatric eczema; acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine and TCM nutritional and lifestyle recommendations.

1. When giving young children **acupuncture** treatments, only very fine and small needles are used. The treatments are generally very quick, and often only a few treatments are required for significant results and relief. Very few acupuncture points are used in one session, and in very young children the needle is taken out straight away rather than retaining it for a period of time. This minimizes discomfort and the need for the child to sit still for long.
2. We mostly prescribe individualised **Chinese herbal medicine** in a granule form. The granules are dissolved into a small amount of liquid (e.g. water). The dosages are generally very low, and are adjusted according to the child's age and size. Depending on the child's age a syringe or dropper is used with 1-2ml per dose or the herbs are diluted into a drink, similar to how you would administer baby Panadol.
3. **Nutrition** and lifestyle care is a crucial aspect of preventing illness and promoting good health for children. It is very important to not over feed children, particularly greasy, fatty or acidic foods. Too many raw foods or icy cold drinks may also stress the digestive system indirectly causing skin irritation or eczema flares. Bland cooked meals are better. They don't have to be tasteless but avoiding overly rich, spicy food or excessive preservatives will definitely help reduce skin reactions.

Check Gardenvale Traditional Chinese Medicine's Facebook page for a comprehensive listing of do's and don'ts relating to paediatric eczema, and for other tips and information.