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TCM: Fungal foes

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Commonly called a yeast infection or thrush, candidiasis is a fungal infection that commonly affects women.

Although traditional Chinese medicine doesn't have a diagnosis of candidiasis, it comes under the categories of genital itching and leukorrhoea. Since yeast thrives in damp conditions, it follows that accumulation of dampness leads to exogenous pathogens taking hold.

Weakness of the kidney and spleen may be involved, since these organs control two important meridians of women. The conception vessel (*ren mai*) provides nourishment for all women's physiological activities. The girdling vessel (*dai mai*) takes charge of nourishing and lubricating the uterus and controls vaginal discharge.

Liver meridian dysfunction develops damp heat, which accumulates around the genitals and can lead to an outbreak of thrush.

In western medicine, thrush treatments are designed simply to kill off yeast cells. In TCM, acupuncture, herbal formulas, and dietary modification can be used in combination. The goal is to control the growth of yeast cells by reducing the nutrient-rich environment that's encouraging them to grow, and strengthening the immune system to prevent recurrence.

First, the excess yeast growth is regarded as a toxic damp heat and can be killed by the application of a herbal formula.

Raw herbs are boiled with water to make a decoction that can be used as a douche. Some standard herbs are sopora root (*ku shen*), burning bush root (*bai xian pi*), cnidium seeds (*she chuang zi*), virgate wormwood herb, patrinia (*bai jiang cao*), wide chrysanthemum, stemona root (*bai bu*), honeysuckle flower and dandelion. Herbal decoctions can also be drunk to clear the damp-heat internally.

Acupuncture treatments work with the herbs to simulate the immune response, clear excess damp heat from the system and rebalance the body.

Once an infection is under control, the next step is to prevent regrowth. A healthy diet and a strong organ system are the keys. An excess of dairy products, spicy or greasy food, sugar or alcohol can promote yeast growth.

Eat foods that may eliminate dampness, such as winter-melon kernel, radish and hyacinth bean. Foods that enhance the spleen and kidney include ginkgo nuts, Chinese chives, euryale seeds, lotus seeds, mutton, and dried mussel.

To clear damp heat, combine winter-melon kernel (50g) and ginkgo nuts (10 pieces). Serve as a dessert. This helps to prevent development of related discharge and itching.

A recipe for tonifying the kidneys is to mix lotus seeds and euryale seeds (100g each), fresh lotus leaf (50g) and glutinous rice (50g). Serve as congee. This helps to arrest excessive discharge.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner.