

Many people with hepatitis C virus (HCV) are turning to Chinese tradition medicine for treatment. Chinese Medicine has a rich history in the treatment of chronic hepatitis.

In the United States , Chinese Medicine is a popular complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapy among patients with chronic liver disease. Anecdotal reports from one of the largest Western medicine hepatology practices in San Francisco suggest that at least 20-30% of patients report use of Chinese Medicine herbs for hepatitis.

Chinese Medicine uses nutrition, acupuncture, heat therapies (such as moxibustion), exercise, massage, meditation, and herbal medicine to treat people infected with HCV decrease symptoms, normalize or lower liver enzymes, and slow the progression of liver disease.

Chinese medical theory states that viral hepatitis is not singular diseases, but are combinations of stages and syndromes. The diagnosis and staging of HCV are accomplished using tongue diagnosis, pulse diagnosis, and questioning according to Chinese Medicine theory.

According to Chinese Medicine, in HCV infections toxic heat enters the body. Manifestations of an invasion of heat include feelings of warmth, sweating, agitation, hot sensation, and itching skin. Examination may reveal a fast pulse and a red tongue. Small red spots on the tongue are a likely finding in nearly all cases of chronic infection ranging from very obvious to barely noticeable.

The organ systems primarily disturbed in hepatitis are the liver and spleen organ systems. These disturbed organ systems affect digestion and energy. According to Chinese Medicine, acute viral hepatitis is generally associated with excess damp heat or damp cold conditions .

The Chinese Medicine stage at which one is diagnosed with Hepatitis C is usually either the chronic stage of Qi stagnation, or the stage of Qi and Yin deficiency.

The various modalities of Chinese Medicine therapy include diet, massage, heat therapies, exercise, meditation, and acupuncture. Heat therapies include the use of moxibustion. Moxibustion is the burning of the herb *Artemisia Vulgaris* (mugwort) over certain areas of the body to stimulate or warm these areas. Also heated packs, often with herbs inside, are used in Chinese Medicine therapy.

Exercise therapy ranges from martial arts to more subtle forms of movement such as Tai Chi and Qi Gong . Many centers of Chinese Medicine include Qi Gong or Tai Chi classes as part of their treatment programs.

Acupuncture is perhaps the most well known form of Chinese Medicine in the United States . It is the art of insertion fine, sterile, metal filiform needles into acupuncture points on the body in order to control the flow of energy. Acupuncture therapy can include electro stimulation and/or hand stimulation. This form of therapy is most appreciated for its ability to relieve

pain. However, acupuncture is also able to help change body energy patterns, which promotes the body's ability to heal itself of organic syndromes and symptoms. In these treatments, Chinese Medicine often does not distinguish energetic effects from physiologic effects.

The different modalities of Chinese Medicine have different aims. Some focus on balancing the body's energy, while others focus on building the physical body and adding substances to both example, the Enhance herbal preparation that is widely used in HCV contains herbs to tonify the spleen Qi . Qi tonification increases the amount of energy in body that is available for certain functions. Qi tonic herbs often have the specific effect of increasing digestion and food absorption. This increases the quality of the blood.

Acupuncture is associated with balancing the body's energy levels; while herbal substances are more like drugs or food in that they have specific organic effects. Breathing exercises are known to strengthen Qi . One meaning of the Chinese word Qi oxygen becomes available to enter the bloodstream.

Combining Eastern and Western Therapies

If you decide to use a combination of eastern and western therapies, you must discuss all of your treatment approaches with both your eastern and western practitioners. The use of some herbal therapies in conjunction with interferon therapy may be inappropriate. However, Chinese medicine can be highly effective for the management of side effects from drug therapy. Chinese Medicine may also be used as an alternative to

western drug therapy in some cases.

Dietary Advice for Hepatitis C Patients

Foods Harmful to the Liver

- *Fried foods* : These produce extra work for the liver.
- *Dairy foods* (milk, cheese, eggs): Should be reduced to a bare minimum.
- *Meat* : Digestion of meat produced nitrogenous waste products, which must be neutralized by the liver before they damage the body. This is hard work for the liver, so meat consumption should be minimal.
- *Margarine* and non-cold-pressed oils: Should be avoided, as these will probably contain chemical residues from their processing.
- *Sugar* : Should be cut from the diet wherever possible because it produces oxalic acid in the intestines, and this has to be neutralized by the liver. A little molasses, honey, or muscovado sugar may be used.
- *All chemical* (i.e., artificial coloring and additives): Should be avoided..
- *Tea and coffee* : Best reduced to a bare minimum because of the stimulating effects they have on the nervous system and

liver.

Foods Beneficial to the Liver

- Carrots : Eat two or three organic raw carrots daily, either as they are, or grated/chopped in salads or side salads.

Alternatively, 1 pint of carrot juice can be drunk daily; this can be freshly juiced preferably or can be obtained bottled. (Carrot juice in aluminum-lined cartons should be avoided because of the dangers of aluminum contamination .) Organic vegetables are readily available in most large super markets, good health food stores, and direct form wholesalers. Organic carrots are grown without chemical fertilizers, and so the liver does not have the extra work of detoxifying and chemical residues. Try to eat only organic vegetables and fruit.

- Most fruits benefit the liver. Lemons are particularly good, in that they relieve congestion and cleanse the liver. The juice of half a lemon can be added to a cup of hot water to make a refreshing, healthy drink. This also aids digestion, taken half an hour before meals. Use lemon juice to replace vinegar in all salad dressings and seasonings.

- Artichokes are particularly good for the liver, as they help with the detoxification of poisons.

Diet, Alcohol, Drugs, and Environment

- Beet, asparagus, chicory, celery, radishes, leeks, onions, garlic, cabbage, and dandelion are also of great benefit. In the spring, dandelion leaves can be obtained from young plants and added

to salad. Later in the year these become bitterer—but can still be used.

- In addition to the foods to be avoided and those to be encouraged, a good whole-food diet is best used, including cereals (wheat, barley, brown rice, and pulses) alfalfa seeds, sunflower seeds, whole-wheat grains, radish seeds, and so on; cooked lentils and pulses and whole-grain, pastry and bread in moderation; a little honey' an occasional egg from a free-range source.
- Drink that especially benefit the liver include thyme tea (infuse a teaspoon in a cup of boiling water for ten minutes), rosemary herb, chamomile, and meadowsweet teas--this last is particularly good for liver problems if they are nerve related.
- Drinking alcohol beverages are strictly prohibited.