



# Auto Immune Disorders

We are seeing an increasing rate of clients with auto immune disorders in the clinic. The most common is rheumatoid arthritis, which is associated with very painful joints and acute degenerative changes in the skeletal structure. Other common auto immune disorders include; psoriasis, Hashimoto and other thyroid disorders, Crohn's disease, Sjogren's syndrome and alopecia. These disorders are very debilitating and often lead to a poor quality of life riddled with pain and difficulty

Western medicine will treat most auto immune diseases with strong medications in an attempt to manage the severity of presenting symptoms. These may be cortisone, which is a steroid treatment for inflammation and pain, or immunosuppressant medications such as methotrexate, which is also used as a form of chemotherapy for treating cancer. These medications will usually have side effects but are often necessary to manage extreme symptoms or flare-ups.

## A Traditional Chinese Medicine Approach

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has had a long history of treating auto immune disorders. Rather than simply trying to manage the symptoms and or suppressing the immune system TCM treats the source issue. Usually auto immune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis develop after someone has experienced trauma or prolonged stress. Such experiences may be emotional or physical. It is not uncommon for someone to experience grief, suffer a virus and physically injure themselves all within a matter of weeks or months. Another scenario may involve a prolonged period of long work hours, stress and a poor diet. After a period of time symptoms start to appear and often escalate quickly. The longer the symptoms are suppressed or ignored the more difficult they may be to treat.

The above mentioned influences can create internal disharmony in the body. TCM states a person's Qi or energy nourishes the whole body from the muscles to the hair, even the mind. A state of well-being depends on the body's quality of Qi. If for some reason the Qi is drained,

weakened or stagnates, this can be the cause of the initial symptoms of an auto immune disease. If this imbalance continues for a long period, the effect on someone's health will be more severe and lead to chronic health problems.

Common TCM patterns of auto immune diseases are usually one of either Qi and Blood deficiency or stagnation. There are many other variations and complications such as dampness and/or toxic heat. Through the use of TCM diagnostic tools, a strategy can be formed to return the body to a better state of health and thereby reducing debilitating symptoms.

## Treatment

Treatment will include acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Massage and cupping may also help to reduce inflammation and pain, especially in some arthritic patients. Acupuncture can target symptomatic local areas providing pain relief as well as affecting the internal body, to restore a more healthy and balanced Qi flow. Chinese herbal medicine can usually be taken with other Western medicine although possible interaction must always be considered. TCM is a safe and effective method of treating the body. On a daily basis TCM will restore health and hopefully allow someone to reduce or eliminate the need for strong Western medications. Then of course it's up to the patient to maintain their health. This means achieving the right balance between work, exercise, rest and nutrition to name but a few.