

Restoring immune health

Many of today's diseases have an immunological basis and research now shows that ageing is directly related to your immune status. Therefore it is not surprising that **optimising your immune function is vital to your health and wellbeing. Naturopath Paul Keogh explains how Chinese medicine can effectively integrate with conventional therapy to achieve this goal.**

Your immune system comprises all the structures and processes of the body that are involved in defeating the attempts of pathogenic (disease causing) forces to overrun, destroy or gain control of any part of the body. Specifically the immune system comprises of:

- anatomic barriers such as the skin and mucous membranes lining the nose, mouth, throat, lungs, and gastrointestinal and urinary tracts, which physically block the entry of foreign organisms and antigens into the body, and
- physiological barriers such as body temperature and acidity, which inhibit the growth of or kill detrimental microorganisms, and
- the various organs and cells of the immune system itself such as the hypothalamus and pineal gland, the lymphatic glands and vessels, and the bone marrow where stem cells produce defensive white blood cells or leukocytes.

When things go wrong

Immune system dysfunction can be triggered by a virus, poor nutrition, physical trauma, toxic chemicals, certain drugs, chemotherapy and psychological stress or may develop gradually without an obvious 'trigger event'. Ordinarily the immune system overcomes or adapts to an event and subsequently recovers. However, problems may develop if components of the immune system become depleted and/or if it remains on high alert after the event has passed.

For example, immune depletion can increase your susceptibility to simple viral infections such as common cold and flu as well as more serious infections like tonsillitis and glandular fever. In addition, immune depletion can have flow-on effects that compromise the health of other systems such as the endocrine (hormonal), nervous and circulatory systems. Over time this may predispose the body to develop certain allergies and autoimmune diseases such as Crohn's disease or rheumatoid arthritis. Invariably, immune dysfunction is linked to a profound loss of vitality referred to as post-viral or chronic fatigue syndromes.

When east meets west

The good news is that Chinese medicine is an effective way to build up your immune defences. The even better news is that in the instance of extreme immune dysfunction, practitioners have found that Chinese medicine can complement conventional medicines to capitalise on the strengths of both systems, providing more effective treatment than either therapy can alone. By the way this is by no means a new concept, the earliest records of 'integrative therapy', as it is now called, dates back to the end of the Qing dynasty (1906-1910)

For the most part, conventional (Western) medicine is concerned with the material phenomena and objective measurements of disease, applying targeted treatments of mainly isolated, synthetic drugs. By contrast, Chinese medicine is interested in the energetic disharmonies and assessment of the patient's state of health, applying holistic treatments of mainly herbal formulas with complex chemistry and multiple actions. Both systems are logically consistent and empirically provable according to their own systematic criteria.

In the main, conventional medicine provides essential drugs to treat serious infections, acute allergic reactions, certain inflammatory diseases, autoimmunity and cancer but the flipside is that most of these drugs can cause significant side-effects when taken long-term and don't fundamentally enhance the body's own defensive and recuperative mechanisms.

Considering the complementary strengths of these two medical systems ie. powerful targeted drugs together with support to the body's resistance mechanisms and innate vitality, integration is a logical way to more effectively treat immune dysfunction and actively promote recovery. In China, this integrated system of therapy is called *Fu Zheng Pei Ben* or *Fu Zheng* for short.

Fu Zheng therapy

By definition, *Fu Zheng* means to rectify and support the normal, healthy vital energy (called *Qi*, pronounced 'chee') of all organs and body systems, while *Pei Ben* means to promote the production of blood cells (including white blood cells) and strengthen the resistant mechanisms of the body especially those relating to healthy immune function.

A Chinese herbal medicine formulated by Dr Subhuti Dharmananda from the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Portland Oregon and developed by Associate Professor Denis Stewart from Newcastle University more than 20 years ago is an excellent example of modern *Fu Zheng* therapy. The combination contains the scientifically proven immune regulating herb called astragalus, blended with seven other traditionally and scientifically evidenced Chinese herbs including atractylodes, schisandra, reishi mushroom, codonopsis, Siberian ginseng, ligustrum and liquorice.

Evidence demonstrates that these herbs are powerful and effective immune response modulators and biological response modifiers. Simply explained, such actions enhance immune surveillance, increase the immune system's capacity to fight infection, strengthen the body's overall capacity to resist disease and promote recovery during convalescence. They achieve this by strengthening non-specific immunity, increasing the adaptive function of the adrenal cortex (to resist stress), enhancing production of white blood cells, providing direct anti-viral action, increasing red blood cells, stimulating hormones such as interferon and promoting the release of protective proteins called immunoglobulins.

In addition, this eight Chinese herb combination provides antiinflammatory, anti-fatigue and mild detoxicant (detoxifying) effects to comprehensively support the body's immune system as well as other systems especially the endocrine, nervous, cardiovascular and eliminative organ-systems including the liver and kidneys.

When to use these eight Chinese herbs

The beauty of this eight Chinese herb combination is it provides a unique and complementary medicine to the conventional treatment of a wide range of immune related disorders. It can be used whenever an immune tonic (immune response modulator) and adaptogen (biological response modifier) is indicated to promote a healthy immune system and support recovery while convalescing after illness. Symptoms addressed by this medicine include lowered resistance to minor infections, slow recovery, night sweats, fatigue, muscle aches, poor appetite, irritability and weakness.

It not only assists in the management of recurrent upper respiratory tract infections, and recurrent colds, flu and sore throats – when taken between bouts of infection – but is valuable in the management of post-viral and chronic fatigue syndromes, and wherever the immune system is compromised by conventional drug therapy.

It also assists with recovery from childhood illnesses, post-operatively and following physical trauma. For sports people and during times of physical stress it helps maintain peak effort, while increasing resistance to infection and enhancing general well-being, at all ages.

Testimonial evidence

Veita from Dorrroughby NSW wrote, “As an aspiring Olympic swimmer, my 10 year old daughter could never have competed in the NSW state titles, coming second in her age, without the Chinese astragalus formula. Before starting on this herbal medicine Jessica suffered constant respiratory infections and was too weak to train. She’d been on endless courses of antibiotics and we’d tried grommets and earplugs but the colds and ear infections continued. She now rarely gets infections and her health is so strong that she is able to maintain her studies, compete and regularly win medals.”

Ron, from Sawtell NSW, was suffering from a medically-managed disease requiring chemotherapy. His doctor recommended that he take this eight Chinese herb combination to help protect and strengthen his immune system during chemotherapy. His specialist supported this advice. During the 14 months of chemotherapy (plus radiotherapy), Ron continued to take the eight Chinese herb combination and his doctors were impressed with how quickly his “bloods picked up and how his immune system kicked in and helped the fight”.

Caution

If you are currently taking conventional medication, we strongly recommend you seek professional advice before commencing herbal medicine to support healthy immune function.

Paul Keogh is executive and technical director for Global Therapeutics P/L trading as Fusion Health. Paul is a qualified naturopath and medical herbalist with 23 years of combined experience in clinical practice and the development of integrated Chinese and Western herbal medicines.