Some Favorite Herbs for Women’s Reproductive Health

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Robin DiPasquale, ND, RH (AHG)
Paeony lactiflora,
White Peony
Bai Shao

TCM Functions

**Nourishes the blood**
For deficient blood patterns - menstrual dysfunction, leukorrhea, uterine bleeding

**Pacifies the liver**
Contrained liver qi

**Alleviates pain**
For spasms, smooth and skeletal muscle

**Retains the Yin**
For deficient yin - sweating and night sweats

**Restrains fluids**
leukorrhea and spermatorrhea
Some Actions of the Active Compound Paeoniflorin

• Acts directly on the ovaries

  * Increase of aromatase enzyme activity - increasing the testosterone --> estradiol conversion
  * Yields a decrease in androgens and a relative balancing of estrogen

Amphoteric -
  * For estrogen excess conditions
  * For estrogen deficient conditions (menopause) - increases conversion in the fatty tissues

• Decreases prolactin

  * Allowing progesterone levels to increase, improving estrogen:progesterone ratios in estrogen excess conditions

• Regulates glucocorticoid effects

  * Supports the regulation of glucose metabolism through cortisol effects

• Anti-spasmodic

• Anti-inflammatory

• Sedating
Some Applications For Paeony

- PMS
- PCOS
- Hyperprolactinemia
- Ovulatory failure
- Infertility
- Dysmenorrhea
- Blood deficiency from menorrhagia or metrorrhagia
- Fibroid tumors
- Endometriosis
- Androgen excess
- Estrogen excess or deficiency
- Mastalgia
- Menopausal symptoms
A Few Classic Combinations:

- *Paeony lactiflora* and *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* or *G. glabra*
  For Deficient Blood, anemia, with muscle spasms in the calves

- *Paeony lactiflora* and *Angelica sinensis* and *Rehmannia glutinosa*
  For deficient Liver Yin, with dysmenorrhea, dizziness, blurred vision

- *Paeony lactiflora* and *Bupleurum falcatum*
  For flank pain from Constrained Liver Qi, symptoms of liver chi stagnation
TCM Functions:
- Tonifies spleen, tonifies Qi
- Moistens the lungs
- Stops coughing
- Clears heat
- Harmonizes other herbs
- Soothes spasm

Glycyrrhiza glabra
Glycyrrhiza uralensis
Licorice
Western Ideas About Licorice:

- The steroidal saponin, glycyrrhetinic acid -
  - Inhibits 17-beta hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase androstenedione --> testosterone in the ovaries (not adrenals)
  - Inhibits 11-beta hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase Cortisol --> Cortisone

Mimics the action of corticosteroid drugs and has a synergistic action with cortisol, extending the half life

- Phytoestrogenic
- Demulcent
- Expectorant
- Anti-inflammatory
- Antiviral
- Hepatoprotective
- Immunomodulator

Caution with long term use in high doses - fluid retention, potassium depletion

Caution in HTN, impaired kidney or heart function - Due to fluid retention
Herbs that tonify the Qi -

- *Glycyrrhiza spp* - harmonizes other herbs
- *Panax ginseng* and *Panax quinquefolius*
- *Codonopsis pilosulae* - nourishing, prevents prolapse
- *Astragalus membranaceus* - tonifies Qi and blood
- *Dioscorea spp* - nourishing to kidneys, benefits lungs
- *Atractylodis macrocephala* - strengthens the spleen
- *Ziziphus jujuba* - nourishes the nutritive Qi
Rehmannia glutinosa
Shu Di Huang

Chinese Fox Glove, Cured - cooked in wine

**TCM Uses -**

- *Tonifies Blood - for deficient blood patterns*
- *Nourishes Yin - for deficient kidney yin*

Note: Sheng Di Huang is uncured Rehmannia, and has different uses.
Rehmannia is referred to as the herb for “weakness of the woman who cannot keep the blood inside of her.”

Cathy’s Case

The traditional treatment has been to eat plump hens and comfort foods, and take herbs that nourish the blood, quiet nervous exhaustion, and support adrenal function.
Herbs that tonify the blood -

• *Rehmannia glutinosa* - the prepared root
• *Polygonatum multiflorum* - Black-haired Mr. He tonifies the **liver** and **kidney**, nourishes blood

• *Angelica sinensis*
  Invigorates and harmonizes blood - **warming**
  Regulates menses, moistens the intestines, moves stool

• *Paeony lactiflora*
  **Restrains yin - cooling**
  Comforts the liver, nourishes the blood

• *Lycium chinense* - the now “famous” gogi berry
  Benefits the essence

• *Mori alba* - bud of the white mulberry
  Nourishes blood and yin

• *Euphoria longan* - longan fruit
  tonifies heart and spleen, calms the spirit, nourishes blood
Decoction of the Four Substances
TCM formula for blood and yin deficiency

- Angelica sinensis
- Paeony lactiflora
- Ligusticum wallichii
- Rehmania glutinosa

In Women’s Precious Pills, Qi tonics are added to the blood above tonics

- Codonopsis pilosula
- Glycyrrhiza uralensis
- Atractylodes marocephala
- Poria cocos
Tribulus terrestris,
Puncture vine

In TCM, Tribulus is used for Liver Yang and Wind Heat in the liver channel.

In western herbal medicine, there is more of a focus on the steroidal saponin influences on hormonal function.
**Tribulus terrestris**

Phytoestrogenic in women - ↑FSH & estradiol
Phytoprogesteronic in men - ↑ LH and testosterone

Active Compound - Furostanol saponins (TLSE from Bulgaria is not <45% furostanol saponins)

Tonic, aphrodisiac, restores and builds vitality

Uses: fertility issues, decreased libido in women, sexual dysfunction in men, menopausal symptoms

Intensifies protein synthesis, enhances enzymatic activity in metabolism, increases absorption of iron, increases serum concentration of GH, insulin, and aldosterone, inhibits lipid peroxidation during stress.

Combines well with *Turnera diffusa* (Damiana), *Paxax ginseng*, *Serenoa repens*, and *Withania somnifera* for libido and sexual function support.

Caution if person has cholestasis.
Artemisia vulgaris, Mugwort

TCM Uses -

• Warms the womb, stops bleeding
• Warms the womb, pacifies the fetus
• Disperses cold and alleviates pain

Main ingredient burned in moxa because of its ability to warm and penetrate the channels
• Artemisia, named after Artemis, the goddess of hunting, young women, and childbirth
• Described as an abortifacient in the Salernitan Regimen of Health written in the 12th and 13th century.
• Uterine tonic is its primary action
  – To regulate the menses
  – To promote blood flow
    • with *Ruta graveolens* and *Mentha pulegium as a tea*
  – To prevent miscarriage (assoc with debility and blood defic)
  – To stop menstrual pain
  – To regulate and strengthen contractions
    • Dysmenorrhea
    • Childbirth
• Other uterine tonics to consider:
  – *Aletris farinosa, Caulophyllum thalicroides, Angelica sinensis, Mitchella repens, and Rubus idaeus*
Nymphae odorata, White Pond Lily

In TCM, *Nelumbo nucifera* genus and species is used.

Rhizome-astringent and breaks up congealed blood, to stop bleeding.

Receptable-used for threatened miscarriage.

Leaf-clears heat patterns, especially in the digestion.
Pond Lily medicine is for **Deficient Kidney Yin** - not enough moisture, too much heat

* A successful combination of tannins and mucilages.

“These roots are mildly and very pleasantly astringent, slightly stimulating, leaving behind a tonic impression, and with just enough mucilage to make their action rather soothing…Their influence is expended upon mucus membranes, excessive discharges from with are lessened by them…and the tone of the structures improved.”  William Cook, 1869

The yellow, *Nuphar luteum*, is more stimulating than the white, *Nymphaea odorata*.

Used for diarrhea and dysentery, leukorrhea, prolapse, cervical ulcerations/cysts/disturbances, prostate irritation, apthous ulcers - overall mucous membrane tonification.
*Nymphaea odorata*, and all pond lilies, are a connection of the earth with the heavens - from the mud, through the water, to the surface where it meets the sky - root chakra through to the crown chakra. It is a connecting medicine.

Cook wrote of *Nymphaea, Liriodendron* (the tulip poplar), and *Mitchella repens*, used together…

“The inner bark of trunk and root, prepared without heat, has action upon the nervous system and uterus, for hysteria, soothing and sustaining. The menses are not influenced. For dysmenorrhea, leucorrhrea, prolapse (mild) and for the uterine suffering incident to pregnancy. For female difficulties connected with nervousness and a poor appetite."
TCM Uses:

- Invigorates the blood, regulates the menses
- Invigorates the blood, reduces masses (infertility caused by stasis of deficient blood)
- Promotes urination and reduces swelling, for edema

Leonurus cardiaca
Leonurus heterophyllus, TCM Motherwort
“…tonic for nervousness, pains and palpitations of the heart, the sufferings peculiar to women, and habitual restlessness. It is an agent deserving of the first consideration…an antispasmodic tonic of the first order.”  William Cook, 1869

*Leonurus cardiaca*

Nervine                      Antispasmodic
Cardiotonic                  Palpitations
Spasmolytic                  Hepatic
Bitter                       Promotes appetite
Anti-thyroid                 Emmenagogue
Facilitates the menses       “Hysteria”
Strengthens on the uterus
Relieves uterine pain due to neuralgic conditions

The gardener’s case
TCM Uses:
• Tonifies original Qi
• Tonifies lungs
• Strengthens spleen
• Tonifies stomach
• Benefits yin and fluids
• Benefits heart Qi, calms the spirit

Panax quinquefolius
American Ginseng