A Herpes Control Diet?

February 17, 2011 By Mike Barr

[NB: I am updating this to make a pitch for the essentiality of the mineral zinc. Not only for control of pretty much all chronic viral infections but also for neurotransmitter & digestive health. I owe a big thanks to Dr. James Greenblatt of Psychiatry Redefined among other undertakings, for educating me on this. I plan a blog post solely dedicated to this topic very soon.]

We entered the world of Wind in our formulas class yesterday. In Chinese medicine, Wind is responsible for just about any symptom associated with unwanted movement. (Yes, Alice is still deep down the rabbit hole.) Tremors, spams, twitches foremost among them. But also perceptions of undesired movement--dizziness and vertigo--or the (perceived) absence of the aforementioned: numbness and joint pain. And alas, rash.

Unexplained and stubborn or recurring rashes are said to be challenging to treat by conventional Western medicine. And even in Asian medical school we were counseled once (again, I believe, by the chair of the herbal medicine program at Emperor's College in Santa Monica) that if any among us dared to become "really, really good" at dermatology, we might one day be able to afford that weekend house in the country (or beach) that our peers had closed on and reappointed decades ago.

Herpes, at least in my mind, presents a particular challenge for Chinese medicine because it comprises both the physical manifestation (itching, sometimes burning pain, redness (sometimes whiteness!)) with what Chinese medicine would likely classify as a Heat Toxin: a virus. It would seem that a two pronged approach would be called for: "Disperse Wind" (for the itching) and "Clear Heat" (for the underlying etiology). The classic TCM formula for skin rashes generally is called Xiao Feng San or "Eliminate Wind Powder (from the True Lineage), but I haven't seen much report of its track record against herpes outbreaks as of yet, and still somewhat a skeptic, I find it difficult to believe that a generic "Banish Wind from Skin and Clear (Damp) Heat" formula could really be that effective against such a tenacious (if generally pretty predictable in its appearance and resolution) infection.

Back in the 1980s it seemed that the common wisdom to brace against an impending herpes outbreak was to load up on lysine--and to stay away from foods high in arginine: primarily nuts and chocolate, or so I was told. That approach seemed surprisingly effective. Certainly gobbling down 1 gram tabs of M&Ms royal blue Valtrex often seems like going after a mosquito with an M1 Abrams tank.

I will consult my nutrition bibles here at home: Healing with Whole Foods (Pitchford) and Prescription for Nutritional Healing (Balch). But I suspect that this terrain is well traveled. What have others discovered? What works best? Meantime I will ask around and see what herbal formulas there might be that are effective for nipping an outbreak in the proverbial bud.

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