

Anxiety

By William Maclean, M.Sc. Chin. Med.

Anxiety is a normal human emotion. Most people will experience it from time to time as a normal response to the stresses and worries



of life. Anxiety becomes a pathological disorder (*jiāo lù zhèng* 焦虑症) when it repeatedly interferes with daily life, is irrational, excessively prolonged or out of proportion with the cause (See box). In Chinese medicine, anxiety is most

frequently associated with disorder of the Heart and *shén*, and to a lesser extent the Liver and Kidneys. The *shén* and *hún* are agitated by heat and constraint, or ungrounded and destabilized by Heart qi, yin or blood deficiency.

ETIOLOGY

Emotional factors

In the Chinese medical model, emotional turmoil of some type is at least partly responsible for all types of anxiety, the exception being anxiety following blood loss. Some people will report a specific history, which may be profound or ongoing. If the triggering situation has ceased, the affected individuals coping and recovery mechanisms may be compromised by a constitutional or acquired weakness. Others deny trauma or stress, and appear to be in supportive family and work situations. In such patients, an emotional or physical trauma is assumed, but may have occurred some time before, become lost in the general run of life or was seemingly trivial and brushed off at the time. At some point, the combination of constitutional predisposition, and other non-emotional contributing factors merge, tipping the patient over into anxiety.

Specific emotions influence certain organ systems preferentially.

Anger, rage and related emotions such as resentment, frustration and bitterness constrain Liver qi when they are repressed, extreme, prolonged or unprocessed. Chronic qi constraint will generate heat which agitates the *shén* and *hún*, or damages blood which then fails to anchor them.

Grief and sadness are normal and appropriate responses to bereavement and loss. When extreme, protracted or unresolved, they can constrain and deplete Heart and Lung qi, leading to fire and/or deficiency.

Excessive or irrational worry and rumination can contribute to both constraint and deficiency. Worry can cause Spleen qi to knot, leading to obstruction of the qi dynamic and depletion of Spleen qi. This in turn gives rise to dampness and phlegm, and in combination with a heating diet or heat from constraint, phlegm heat.

The Kidney-Heart axis can be disrupted by sudden physical or emotional shock, leading to a loss of communication between the Heart and Kidneys and disruption to the relationship between the *shén* and *zhì*. This most commonly gives rise to anxiety with insomnia, and is often a factor in the anxiety accompanying post-traumatic stress disorder.

Constitution

Many patients with anxiety disorder have a family history. A predisposition to anxiety may pass through the Heart and Kidneys (*shào yīn*), the Liver, Spleen, and Lungs, or as a tendency to phlegm accumulation. When the Heart and Kidneys are weak, anxiety is noted during childhood or adolescence. A congenital weakness of Heart qi can lead to an anxious disposition (technically known as Heart and Gallbladder qi deficiency), whereas weakness of the Kidneys leads to fearfulness, timidity and phobias. Congenital weakness of the Lungs

PATTERNS OF ANXIETY

- Qi deficiency
- Blood deficiency
- Yin deficiency
- Qi constraint
- Phlegm heat
- Blood stasis

WHEN DOES EVERYDAY ANXIETY BECOME AN ANXIETY DISORDER?	
Everyday anxiety	Anxiety disorder
Worry about everyday matters, finances, employment, relationships and health of family	Constant, unsubstantiated and out of proportion worry that interferes with daily life
Embarrassment and self-consciousness in unfamiliar or awkward social situations	Inability to deal with and avoidance of social situations for fear of panic
Anxiety and nerves before an important event, test, presentation or performance	Anxiety and panic attacks for no apparent reason, or out of proportion to the situation
Rational fear and avoidance of danger and potentially dangerous situations	Irrational fear and avoidance of otherwise benign situations, people, places, animals
Anxiety, sadness and sleep problems after a traumatic event, but which diminish with time and processing	Persistent anxiety, panic attacks, nightmares or flashbacks related to a traumatic event that may have occurred months or years before
Paying attention to hygiene, being careful in your environment and immediate situation	Obsessive compulsion with rituals, cleanliness, conscious of washing, checking and rechecking doors and windows

foods, sugar, soft drinks, carbohydrates, alcohol, fats and dairy can aggravate a tendency to phlegm accumulation.

Overwork, exhaustion
Working excessively long hours or laboring to the point of exhaustion depletes Spleen and Kidney yang qi. Any activity that excessively taxes the Spleen will lead to qi and blood deficiency, and the creation of phlegm damp. A sudden blood loss, or increase in the demands

contributes not only to respiratory problems, but also to a tendency to be disengaged from the world, and to feelings of isolation and separation.

Congenital weakness of the Spleen can lead to a tendency to worry and to issues around food, compounding deficiency states or phlegm damp accumulation. A phlegm type constitution is usually apparent from a relatively early age, with a tendency to weight problems, concentration difficulties and lack of energy.

- CAUSES OF ANXIETY**
- hyperthyroidism
 - pheochromocytoma
 - temporal lobe epilepsy
 - hypoglycemia
 - cardiac arrhythmia
 - menopausal syndrome
 - premenstrual syndrome
 - stress
 - post-traumatic stress disorder

- Drugs**
- withdrawal from or dependence on benzodiazepine, alcohol and other drugs of addiction
 - amphetamines
 - bronchodilators
 - caffeine intoxication
 - ephedrine
 - levodopa
 - thyroxine

Conversely, an inherited Spleen deficiency can lead to anorexia and a persistent refusal to eat, or an obsessive or rigid attitude to food, resulting in depletion of qi and blood and a thin body.

Diet
The diet plays a minor role in most cases of anxiety, nonetheless may sometimes contribute, in particular when it contributes to blood deficiency or phlegm. An inadequate diet,

too cold, raw, restrictive or lacking in protein can lead to qi and blood deficiency.

An overly heating, drying or spicy diet may generate heat and damage yin. A diet rich in phlegm generating

placed upon the blood, can contribute to anxiety. This is seen in some postpartum women, where hemorrhage, breast feeding, inadequate rest and poor replacement of blood converge.

Activity levels
Increasingly sedentary work practices and leisure activities are a significant contributor to the rising levels of Spleen deficiency, phlegm accumulation and qi and blood stasis. Regular physical activity and exercise have been shown to have a major positive impact on anxiety and depression.

TREATMENT
Patients with anxiety need to be treated with special care. Many will be phobic and fearful of acupuncture. Communication and technical skills are essential to reassure the patient and engage them in a program of treatment. Many patients will be medicated with anxiolytic drugs. Where appropriate and with the collaboration of the prescribing physician, medications should be gradually withdrawn as constitutional treatment proceeds.

Experience shows that acupuncture is very helpful in calming the shén with application of needles on a weekly or twice-weekly basis ensuring the momentum of treatment. Concomitantly, herbs are best for replenishing yin and blood and anchorage to the shén. Acupuncture and herbs are effective at ameliorating the withdrawal effects of pharmaceutical medications, while dealing with the problem that gave rise to the anxiety in the first place. It is important to note other drugs that may be influential, and to elicit a full list of medications or other potentially aggravating substances being used. In addition to the drugs noted in the box to the left, substances such as appetite suppressants and caffeine may be implicated. Excessive use of caffeine (in coffee, chocolate and cola drinks) is a reasonably common cause of anxiety and easy to overlook.

Anxiolytic drugs
The conventional drugs used to treat anxiety deserve a mention here

KEY DIAGNOSTIC POINTS

Tongue

- pale – qi and/or blood deficiency
- red – yin deficiency
- thick yellow coat – phlegm Heat
- purple or with dark distended sublingual veins – blood stasis

Pulse

- irregularly irregular – Heart qi and yin deficiency
- fine and rapid – yin deficiency
- rapid and slippery, or wiry – phlegm heat
- fine and weak (especially in the distal position) – Heart qi deficiency

Aggravation

- with tiredness – deficiency
- with loud noises, changes of routine – Heart qi deficiency

because they are so widely used, can create dependence and become a source of the problem they were designed to treat.

Anxiety has too often been deemed pathological and medicated inappropriately by health professionals lacking the time or skills to address the feeling or emotions behind the anxiety. Women in particular have often been prescribed

¹Benzodiazepenes include drugs such as alprazolam (Xanax), diazepam (Valium), nitrazepam (Mogadon) and chlordiazepoxide (Librium)

²Withdrawal symptoms from benzodiazepines include anxiety, hallucinations, hypersensitivity, seizures, paranoid delusions, tremors, insomnia, palpitations, gastrointestinal upset

³Ci shi (Magnetitum), dai zhe shi (Haematitum), long gu (Fossilia Ossid Mastodi) etc.

sedatives for distress following bereavement or resulting from intolerable domestic or work situations. Such over prescribing and abuse of tranquilizers and anxiolytic agents has brought with it its own problems. Prolonged use of benzodiazepine agents¹ in particular has many unpleasant side effects and withdrawal symptoms². This class of drug acts in a similar fashion to the heavy mineral substances that are used in Chinese medicine to suppress ascendant yang and sedate and anchor the *shén*³. The consequences of prolonged use of a single (and unbalanced substance) such as this are several; their bitter cool nature damages Heart and Kidney yin, weakens the Spleen, congests the Liver and further destabilizes the *shén*.

Depending on the clinical manifestations in such cases, the relevant acupuncture and herbal treatment from this chapter may be applied to ameliorate the heightened anxiety and other symptoms experienced when withdrawing from prescription medication.

Bio: William Maclean, M.Sc Chin. Med. is an internationally renowned practitioner, teacher and author from Australia, with 25 years of clinical experience in the field of Chinese medicine. Will teaches in the Masters programs at the University of Sydney and University of Technology Sydney, and lectures to students and practitioners around the world. In addition to his long years in practice, Will is the author (with Jane Lyttleton) of the Clinical Handbook of Internal Medicine series Volumes 1, 2 and 3, the Clinical Manual of Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines, and the Clinical Handbook of Chinese Herbs: Desk Reference.

Also by William Maclean:

A new and expanded edition of the Clinical Handbooks of Internal Medicine to be available at the end of the year:

Clinical Handbook of Internal Medicine, Vol. 1, Lung, Kidney, Liver, Heart

William Maclean, Jane Lyttleton

The first of a 3-volume TCM clinical guide, covering Lung, Kidney, Liver and Heart disorders. Within each organ's section, pathologies are organized by established TCM patterns within biomedical categories. All disorders are discussed with reference to etiology pathophysiology, clinical features, treatment principle, prescription, modifications, patent medicines, applicable acupuncture points and clinical notes. Where applicable, variations and additional prescriptions are referenced. In addition, appendices contain information on; original unmodified formulas, processing methods, delivery methods, herbs contraindicated during pregnancy, incompatible and antagonistic herbs, toxic substances, and medicinals derived from endangered species and animals. A comprehensive and intuitive index makes it easy to search for topics by biomedical application, formula name or TCM pattern.

Clinical Handbook of Internal Medicine, Vol. 2, Spleen and Stomach

William Maclean, Jane Lyttleton

The second of a 3-volume TCM clinical guide, with in-depth analysis of more than 20 common disorders affecting the Spleen and Stomach. Each pattern is discussed from the perspective of its presentation and treatment in a Western context, with insights, practical advice and clinical tips relevant to Western patients. Keys to diagnosis and pattern identification accompany major disorders. Disorders are discussed with reference to etiology pathophysiology, clinical features, treatment principle, prescription, variations, modifications, patent medicines, applicable acupuncture points and clinical notes. The clinical notes section offers general prognoses to help elucidate the kind of results that may be reasonably expected when correct treatment is applied, as well as a general estimate of the length of treatment required. As an added benefit the text includes a section on diet which includes information on what foods help treat common TCM patterns as well as a section on the properties and TCM actions of common foods.

Clinical Handbook of Internal Medicine, Vol. 3, Qi, Blood, Fluid, Channels

William Maclean, Jane Lyttleton

This is the final volume of a 3-volume TCM clinical guide. It focuses on diseases of qi, blood, and fluids, and contains chapters on abdominal masses, blood stasis, colds and flu, depression, diabetes, edema, fainting, fits and funny turns, acute fever, persistent and recurrent fever, gallbladder disorders, headache, hysteria, neck lumps, numbness, obesity, painful obstruction (bi), phlegm disorders, purpura, sweating, thin mucus syndromes, and tiredness. All disorders are discussed with reference to etiology, pathophysiology, clinical features, treatment principle, prescription, modifications, patent medicines, applicable acupuncture points and clinical notes. A comprehensive and intuitive index makes it easy to search for topics by biomedical application, formula name or TCM pattern.

The Clinical Manual of Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines- Channels

William Maclean, Kathryn Taylor

The extensively revised second edition (August 2003) of the Clinical Manual of Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines is an essential addition to the desk and bookshelf of all practitioners and students interested in using patent medicines. One nice feature of the text is its use of small icons in the left margin to highlight useful information. Each formula is discussed in terms of its TCM Actions, Biomedical actions, Indications, Composition, Combinations, Dose and Method of Administration, and Cautions and Contraindications. Another feature that facilitates quick reference is the authors' use of simple line drawings to illustrate the key symptoms and signs for each formula/pattern. These are often expressive of the emotional and psychological characteristics that match

the pattern indicated. The text also includes: - An intuitive 75 page index, complete with listings for both biomedical and TCM disorders. - Tables of comparisons between similar formulas designed to aid differentiation. - Potential herb drug interactions laid out in table form. - A glossary describing the TCM medical terms used in the text in clear language.

Clinical Handbook of Chinese Herbs

William Maclean

Proficiency in the prescription of Chinese herbs depends not only on good diagnosis but on an intimate knowledge of the raw materials. This in turn depends on being able to discriminate the fine points of difference between the similar herbs within a group, and a deep understanding of the unique characteristics of each herb. This volume of comparative charts is designed to aid the student or the busy practitioner in selecting the optimal medicinals for their patients. Each table describes the characteristics of a group of herbs, including extensive indications with relative strengths of action and function, the domain, flavor, nature, and dosage guidelines. The tables and text in this book will facilitate efficient comparative study for the student, as well as make clear the fine points of discrimination for the experienced practitioner. Easy to use, with clear and accurate tables comparing all the main herbs used in a modern clinic, this tome is a practical assistant to the complex world of Chinese herbal prescription.