



Searles Wellness

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Chinese Medicine and the Treatment of Skin Complaints

Skin is the largest body organ and serves as a protective barrier against harmful effects caused by the environment. When skin is healthy, we rarely think about it, but when it has problems, it can cause serious disruptions to our well being. By some estimates, up to 25 % of the population in Western countries may have skin problems and the majority of these people do not seek professional medical advice. Generally most people rely on home remedies, over the counter products, internet information or pharmacists to resolve problems.

In SE Portland, consumers buy homeopathy, vitamin or mineral supplements, native herbal tinctures, digestive enzymes, essential oils, aroma therapies, scrubs, topical creams, cover up cosmetics, or try cleansing diets to help common skin conditions. If the skin problem clears, the effectiveness of those products remains a mystery. Was the rash a self limited condition that likely would have cleared without treatment? When is “creative self care” poor care? When is partaking in a potpourri of treatments a waste of money, harmful or a delay in a accurate diagnosis? Would it be wiser to get a biopsy or maybe take an antibiotic if it was really needed? Each person’s case must be evaluated individually. The study of Chinese Medicine helps make sense out of why season changes, changes in our lifestyles, emotional states, environments, menstrual cycles and diets can cause havoc with skin.

I came to this practice through my personal healing process. After contracting a very persistent itchy dermatitis, I found no relief with a variety of both Western medicines and herbal supplements. As an Adult Nurse Practitioner since 1981 with a specialty in Dermatology since 1995, I was very resistant to admitting a lack of effectiveness of western treatments. Surprisingly, Chinese Herbal Medicine and acupuncture brought a remarkably speedy cure for my itching. Amazed with the outcome, I committed myself to the study of Chinese Medicine, particularly to treatments for Dermatologic conditions.

Chinese Medicine is actually a “number of practices” which identify patterns of imbalances at the root of a health problem. A combination of treatments may be implemented including acupuncture, herbs, Tui Na bodywork, shiatsu massage, Qi Gong exercises, and therapeutic diet. Often it is said Chinese Medical modalities will, at the very least, help patients feel more energetic and more relaxed. At its best, Chinese medicine can cure or help to cure conditions that have been called incurable. Today, Chinese Medicine represents a combination of ideas and methods from

earlier times coupled with the findings from modern research methods, imaging techniques, chemical analysis, pharmacological testing and clinical trials. Utilizing the traditional Chinese Medicine diagnostic tools of tongue observation, pulse reading, palpation, and physical examination with a complete in-depth history of the patient serves as a basis of pattern identification contributing to understanding the root causes of skin problems.

Western Dermatologic evaluation may require additional testing with skin biopsies, lab studies, allergy patch testing, and microscopic evaluations. With the advantage of both Western and Chinese treatment options, I can focus on eliminating causative imbalances.

For example, hair loss in post-menopausal women might be treated with acupuncture, herbal tonics which harmonize and balance the heat in the body to control rising of the heat, additional iron supplementation, “cooling” diet and/or Rogaine (minoxidil) topical foam. With this comprehensive treatment plan, the Chinese Herbal formulas are taken orally, pharmaceuticals may be used topically and dietary supplements are prescribed when appropriate. Lab studies can then be rechecked and/or hair biopsies at a later time. Bio identical hormones may be prescribed if there are no contradictions.

In these times, integrating the healing approach using both Western and Chinese medicine to treat and/ or cure complex skin conditions makes sense. Chronically irritated or itchy skin conditions like eczema, psoriasis, lichen planus, acne, rosacea, fungal infections, hair loss, pigmentation abnormalities and skin eruptions from chemotherapy or chronic hepatitis respond well to this approach.

Sometimes a “wart is just a wart”; and a skin cancer check is just that when done by someone with years of expertise. To every patient, I commit my broad medical expertise along with enthusiasm and compassion to help patients with skin concerns or other health problems.

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