

# SHULAN CLINIC – ACUPUNCTURE • CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

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## Phlegm – by Prof. Shulan Tang

At some point everyone suffers from phlegm. Maybe you have a cold, which 'gets on your chest' and then gives you a bad cough. However you get it, it is very irritating. So how does TCM treat it?

Phlegm is also called catarrh and is a symptom of many diseases. TCM differentiates phlegm into concrete and formless phlegm. Concrete phlegm refers to the visible, palpable and audible parenchymatous phlegm, whereas formless retention of phlegm refers to the various conditions caused by the retention of phlegm, such as dizziness, chest tightness, depression and epilepsy, characterised by a greasy coating on the tongue and a slippery pulse.

It is called 'formless phlegm' because this kind of phlegm shows its symptoms, but has no concrete visible form, and can be cured by methods of eliminating phlegm.

Generally, a lot of people complain of catarrh, which is visible. Visible phlegm can be further divided into Heat phlegm, Cold phlegm, Damp phlegm and Dry phlegm.

### Heat phlegm

#### Symptoms

Green or yellow colour phlegm, accompanied by cough, chest infection, sore throat, red tongue with yellow greasy coating and slippery rapid pulse.

#### Treatment

Clear away the heat and eliminate phlegm

#### Prescription

Qin Qi Hua Tan Wan

She Dan Chuan Bei Ye

### Cold Phlegm

#### Symptoms

White in colour, profuse and frothy, accompanied by cough, flu or asthma. General feeling of cold, pale tongue with white greasy coating and slippery and slow pulse.

#### Treatment

Warm the lung and resolve the phlegm.

#### Prescription

Xiao Qing Long Tang

### Damp Phlegm

#### Symptoms

Thick white phlegm, poor appetite, tightness in chest, white coating and a soft slippery pulse.

#### Treatment

Strengthen the Spleen; dry the dampness to resolve the phlegm.

#### Prescription

Er Chen Wan, Jian Pi Wan

### Dry Phlegm

#### Symptoms

Sticky dry phlegm, difficulty in expectorating, shortness of breath, red tongue, no coating, thirst, thready and slippery pulse, usually seen in cases of chronic asthma.

#### Treatment

Tonify Yin and nourish the Lung.

#### Prescription

Bai He Gu Jin Wan

Chuan Bei Pi Pa Lu

Phlegm is characterized by an accumulation of dampness as a pathological product resulting from disturbances in water metabolism. TCM refers to phlegm as due to deficiency of Spleen Qi, which fails to transport the body fluids to the normal channels, thus resulting in retardation of phlegm.

Phlegm usually affects the Lungs, causing cough, asthma or difficulty breathing. It is said that 'the Spleen is the source of phlegm, the lung is the container of phlegm', so when we treat phlegm, the emphasis is usually on the Spleen and Lung.

Improper diet is also a major cause of phlegm. Those suffering from catarrh should avoid eating foods which are fatty and greasy, such as cheese, cream and chocolate. Radishes and celery are excellent for resolving phlegm.

### Case Study

In October 2000, Mr. Zhang, 40 years old, went to China on business. He consumed a lot of rich, greasy food, and drank too much alcohol while he was there. In addition, he was suffering with a chest infection.

On returning to England, he noticed that he had green sticky phlegm stuck in his throat all the time. He needed to go to the bathroom to spit it out every few minutes. The phlegm blocked his nose, causing him to snore so loudly at night that his wife had to go to another bedroom to sleep.

A month later, Mr. Zhang came to my clinic for treatment. I prescribed She Dan Chuan Bei Ye to resolve heat phlegm and Yin Huang Kou Fu Ye to clear away the lung heat. He took one tube each day. Two days later he felt a lot better.

As he wanted to get better quicker, he tripled his intake to two tubes three times a day. The phlegm cleared up completely and the snoring ceased, however, because he had overdosed himself, the cooling herbs caused him severe stomach ache and diarrhoea. He lost his appetite and felt very tired.

When he came back to the clinic again a few weeks later, I told him to stop the first prescription and change to Xiang She Yang Wei Wan to warm the stomach and to stop the diarrhoea. He recovered well just in time for Christmas.