Histamine, Mast Cells, and Chinese Medicine: A Root-Cause Approach to Allergies Transcript

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Diet Basics and Mediterranean Recommendation

There's no perfect diet for everybody. I get asked this question all the time. Now, actually, if I had to in the dark suggest a diet for someone, I would suggest the Mediterranean diet.

It always beats out all of the other diets when they're compared in large-scale studies. Now, some people, particularly with horrible gut problems and allergenic problems do better on a carnivore diet for a little while.

Some people do better on a vegetarian diet, but overall, the diet that works the best for everybody is the Mediterranean diet. Hi, and welcome to The Balancing Point.

I'm Dr. John Needers, and I'm here to make traditional Chinese medicine, functional medicine, and integrative health simple, practical, and fun, so you can restore balance, boost vitality, and enjoy a healthier life every single day.

Hi y'all, this is Dr. John back here with another presentation of The Balancing Point. And you can find these episodes on The Balancing Point or at Dr.

Talks or any of your favorite outlets for podcasts and videos. So today's presentation, I will be doing a PowerPoint, but it will also flow nicely if you're just doing it as an auditory.

file. If you're doing it as a visual, sometimes it goes a little bit slow and you might want to pick it up to one and a half times speed. That's how I watch almost everything.

So today I want to talk about the combination of traditional Chinese medicine and functional medicine to calm allergic reactions.

Show Introduction and Allergy Focus

Here we are in springtime again and we're going to be flooded in my clinic with people coming in with tons and tons of seasonal allergies. We always get a significant number of food sensitivities and food allergies, which we're treating also.

So I'm going to talk about both of those today. And again, I'm going to talk about it mostly from a traditional Chinese medical point of view. At another episode, I'll talk about it more from a functional medicine point of view.

So today I'll be mostly TCM with a little functional. And so treating allergies and food sensitivities. So what's traditional Chinese medicine? Just to kind of kick us off, Chinese medicine is well over 2000 years old.

And you notice I didn't say traditional because what's now called traditional is not. It's really post Maoist Chinese medicine. And it was made so that it fit better with Western medicine.

And so there's great value in both, in all of those systems. I was trained by several pre Maoist doctors. And so I got that view also. Now the oldest book on Chinese medicine and health that still exists that we can find is called the Huang Dini Jing.

And that's translated as the yellow emperor's classic of medicine. The yellow emperor is the famous empire that united all of China. He caused massive canals to be constructed to length and north and the south for commerce.

He set up standardized language. He set up standardized coins and coinage and ways to pay for goods. And so he's quite, quite famous. And so the book, the Huangdi Nei Jing, is a conversation that Huangdi, the emperor, is having with one of the people in his court, who's a doctor, and he's asking him questions.

You're like, why do people die at 50 years old when I've heard they used to live to be over 100?

What Chinese Medicine Is

And so the person he's talking to goes into great detail about how to live to be a hundred years old. And most of these old Chinese doctors lived into a ripe old age because they followed their own advice.

Kind of crazy, huh? It's extremely accurate, the Huangdi Neijing, and it's still useful for lifestyle and for treatment, for seasonal eating, for how much you should sleep at different times of year, et cetera.

Now it originated in China, but China and India, you know, ideas were going back and forth and Japan slipped a few things in there. Not so much at the beginning, but they were very much influenced by Chinese medicine.

Now, Chinese medicine, as we call it, or some people call it Southeast Asian medicine, is the primary type of medicine that has been practiced in that area for 2,000 years.

And it is still practiced today. I studied in several medical hospitals that were Chinese medical hospitals, herbal, acupuncture, et cetera. Huge hospitals.

The largest stroke hospital in the world is in China. At that hospital, now hold on to your seats here, they treat 10,000 stroke and neurological patients per day, 10,000 per day.

Person that ran that hospital for many, many years, won tons of awards, has the highest stroke recovery rate of any hospital in the world by the Edinburgh scale, which is comparing all forms.

of medicine for stroke care was one of my teachers. So the issue of traditional Chinese medicine is we're focusing on balance in the body. It uses natural and holistic treatments.

Those terms are often misunderstood. They used animal products. They used insects. They used herbs. plants, etc. It treats the body, mind, spirit, and it always, always keeps in mind the environment.

The main goal is to restore balance so the body can heal itself. I've often told patients there is more intelligence in one cell in a human body than in all the books ever written about medicine, right?

The body knows how to heal itself if we simply allow it to be in balance. So that's the main goal of Chinese medicine. So if you have an overactive immune system, which often happens with allergies, we don't want to shut it off.

That exposes you to all sorts of other illnesses. If you've watched any of the commercials for a variety of skin conditions, et cetera, or colon conditions, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, dermatitis, always in those ads.

They'll say it can cause death. Seriously. And all sorts of other problems. Well, we want to get to the root of the problem and restore equilibrium. And then the body doesn't need those strong treatments.

So some very core concepts, Qi, we talk about Qi a lot. Now I'm not going to go into detail because there are so many interpretations. If you look at a Chinese dictionary, there's a long list.

So we often think of it as vital energy or life force. can be translated as breath. So it is just critical. Without qi, you don't live. And then this idea of yin and yang, it's the balance of opposites.

And by the way, they're complementary opposites that mutually engender each other. One cannot exist without the

other. Now you can be more yin or you can be more yang, but they must coexist.

Now think the theory of relativity by Einstein where he said E equals MC squared. So he's saying energy equals mass times the constant of the speed of light squared.

In that equation, the M or mass is the yin. It's the solid. It's the material. While the E or energy is more yang.

Core TCM Concepts: Qi, Yin-Yang, and Meridians

It's the stuff that you can't really see as well. And so it's this balance of yin the solid mass and yang, the vital energy that keeps us moving and keeps us alive and keeps us healthy.

Now the meridians, which has many, many different translations, some people call them channels, some people call them meridians, but basically they're energy pathways.

This is so misunderstood. These meridians 223 out of 224 points that were dissected lie directly over nerves and generally over nerve bifurcations where nerves bifurcate or split off from each other.

And by treating at those points, you're affecting the neurology. Now, there are many, many other things that get affected, but that's one. We can measure those.

We have many devices in our office to measure the energy flow, the chi flow, the resistance to flow in those channels. It's palpable. If you've been trained, then you can actually feel that flow.

Catherine, who works with me and does most of the acupuncture, One of the things she will do is to analyze with her hands the chi flow in the meridians.

Now, again, the Chinese aren't the only people that discovered this. See, they didn't create it. That's what people think. They made this up. They created it.

They didn't. It is a system. It is in every body. Many other cultures have identified those exact same energy systems and describe them. Ayurveda goes into great detail about that, the Indian systems.

The Mayans called them the rivers, I'm sorry, the wind and the channels. The Incas called them the rivers of light. So many cultures knew this. Utsi the Iceman, 6,000 years old, they pulled him out of the Alps.

where he had been buried in the snow for 6,000 years, and he had the meridians tattooed on his body, and the points that they would treat his problems were tattooed on his body.

So we're also gonna talk about organ systems, and they don't always line up with Western organs, like the heart is a heart, but in Chinese medicine has many, many, many other known functions.

In fact, the term for heart is sheen, which means heart-mind. It's both. And so a much better understanding of the interconnectedness energetically. And Western medicine's coming along.

They're kind of figuring it out. They're seeing that these meridians are real. They're seeing these organ systems really do have a connection. So here's how TCM views allergies.

They see it as an imbalance, not just an immune reaction. If the body's in balance, it won't have that immune reaction. So in Western medicine, allergies are caused by the immune system overreacting to some influence, right?

It might be pollens, grasses, molds. It might be a food. In TCM, traditional Chinese medicine, allergies happen when the body's defenses are either weak or unbalanced.

Allergies are often linked to these following energetic and organ systems in Chinese medicine. Lung weakness. For example, the lung system at TCM controls breathing and immune defense.

Now, if you think about it, the lung is the most likely place for pathogens to attack. It is the only organ that comes into direct contact with the environment.

You're breathing things in. And so having an immune defense in the lungs that is very, very powerful is critical. So weakness in the lungs can lead to hay fever or asthma or any number of other problems.

Spleen weakness. Now spleen, there are two characters for spleen in Chinese medicine. One is the spleen as we know it, the organ that holds your blood, et cetera, same as Western medicine.

But spleen otherwise is a functional, a functional issue.

How TCM Explains Allergies

And if you look at that function, it's really the function of the small intestine and the pancreas and the digestive enzymes. And so spleen she weakness can lead to digestive dysfunction, food sensitivities, allergies, weight gain, edema, swelling, fatigue, right?

Because what we say in Chinese medicine is that the spleen. absorbs or draws upward the pure essence from your food. That would be your vitamins, minerals, etc.

It will then allow the turbid to flow down and that's your stool that's going to come out. And so the spleen is responsible in Chinese medicine for that function.

So if it's weak, You're going to have fatigue. You're going to be tired. You're going to gain weight, right? You're going to absorb that which you should not, and you won't absorb that's what you should.

And then we look at external factors like wind and dampness. There's a saying that the wind is the leader of the hundred evils. And I'll tell you, in terms of climate, I'm okay with hot.

I'm okay with cold. I'm okay with rain. Boy, do I a poor wind. So, you know, maybe it's the Chinese medicine in me, I don't know, but every year I get more and more sensitive to the wind.

Now, food sensitivities in TCM, this is how I got into Chinese medicine and functional medicine was around food sensitivities and digestive issues. And so, Food sensitivities are related to the spleen and stomach systems, which are paired organs.

We say that the stomach rots and ripens the food, which is actually what happens, right? That's where it's being broken down so that it can pass into your small intestine.

So there are many schools of thought in Chinese medicine, just like there are in medicine, just like there are in psychology. You can be a Freudian or a Jungian or a cognitive behavior specialist, etc.

Or in economics, you know, lots of economic theories. Same as in TCM. And I am of the school of the spleen and stomach. My hero is Li Dongyan. And Li Dongyan wrote the Pi Wei Lun, or can be translated as the classic of the spleen and stomach, in around 1249 A. D.

And man, he nailed it. What we call metabolic syndrome, diabetes, heart disease, overweight, et cetera, cholesterol problems, he nailed it in 1249. And he came up with profound treatment plans for all of those issues.

And so in TCM, we believe, that the spleen and stomach are responsible for digestion and turning food into energy. If they're weak, the body won't process foods properly, leading to sensitivities rather than immediate allergic reactions.

An immediate allergic reaction, like someone eats a peanut and dies, is a different process. Now, poor digestion equals poor energy production. You get bloating, fatigue, diabetes, other blood sugar problems and skin reactions.

Some common TCM treatments for allergies. Herbal medicine is the number one form of medicine in China today. I studied in hospitals where enormous hospitals that were really primarily herbal medicine and some Western medicine and a little bit of acupuncture.

Acupuncture there was more for anxiety and for musculoskeletal injury, sports medicine, et cetera. Now, acupuncture helps everything. We use it for a lot of different things.

We use a lot of electroacupuncture, which makes it even more powerful. And we can use certain frequency patterns to treat neurological conditions on the brain, et cetera.

But still, herbal medicine is primary. It is personalized. Herbal formulas are often used to strengthen weak systems, but they can also be used to common control excess systems.

There are very powerful antiviral formulas, very powerful antibiotic formulas that have been used for 2,000 years. There are very powerful antifungal formulas.

In fact, there are over 10,000 well-researched formulas. Now, most people are not aware of this, MDs I find are usually have no idea. And there are about 10,000 studies published per year on herbal medicine in peer-reviewed journals worldwide.

Treatments: Herbs, Acupuncture, Diet, and Lifestyle

And these are the same journals, these are the same researchers that are doing the pharmaceutical research, okay? These are PhDs that are doing brilliant research.

Number three is diet therapy. There's no perfect diet for everybody. I get asked this question all the time. Now, actually, if I had to in the dark suggest a diet for someone, I would suggest the Mediterranean diet.

It always beats out all of the other diets when they're compared in large-scale studies. Now, some people particularly with horrible gut problems and allergenic problems, do better on a carnivore diet for a little while.

Some people do better on a vegetarian diet. But overall, the diet that works the best for everybody is the Mediterranean diet. And you can see why. It's a balanced diet.

But in general, we're all different. We all have different nutritional needs. For example, in children and menstruating women, I'm constantly trying to get their iron levels up.

In men and menopausal women, I'm constantly trying to get their iron levels down because it can cause more heart attacks. So again, how old are you? What's your gender, et cetera?

What's your genetic background? So everybody has different nutritional needs. Diet therapies generally avoid foods that weaken digestion, like too much cold or too much processed food.

Then lifestyle, huge, huge for Chinese medicine and functional medicine. Lifestyle style habits like sleep, how much sleep are you getting? You need a lot more sleep in the winter than you do in the summer.

And in the Wang Bin, Wang Bin Nei Jing, it basically said in the summer, go to bed late and get up early. In the winter, go to bed early and get up late.

Right? Huge difference. At this time of year, which is spring, it's a pretty even balance as we're getting toward the time of year where the yin and yang, the night and day are more balanced.

So some examples of dietary advice. Now, generally recommended. Again, everybody's different. You know, someone that's pregnant may get completely different advice than an 80 year old man.

So, generally warm cooked foods. Cooked foods are much easier to digest. Now, smoothies are generally okay because the cell walls have been broken down on the vegetables.

If you don't do something to break down the cell walls, it's very, very difficult to get the nutrition out of it. So Chinese like warm cooked foods, very easy on the gut.

For food sensitivities, we like a lot of soups, a lot of cooked vegetables and very specific soups for very specific issues. Again, cold foods, ice cream, raw foods weaken the digestion.

Avoid excessive dairy and sugar. Eat according to season. And seasonal eating is so critical to health. What you eat in the spring should be very different than what you eat in November and December.

For example, in the spring, we should eat a lot of cooked green vegetables. A little raw vegetable there is okay because it's very cleansing. You're not going to get as much food value out of it as if you, say, lightly steamed some broccoli for five minutes.

You're going to get more food value out of it than if you eat it raw. But the raw, the fiber that's supplied will be cleansing to your digestive system.

So spring is the season of the liver. And after a long winter of eating heavier foods, the liver will need cleansing foods. You've got to clear everything out so the liver can do its job.

And then we want to identify trigger foods. Again, the goal is to support the body rather than just suppress symptoms. In fact, suppressing symptoms will generally make things worse in the long run.

For example, if someone is having histamine reaction, which is just rampant in our country, mast cell activation syndrome, histamine problems, which I'm going to do a talk on very soon, are just rampant.

But if you take antihistamines, what antihistamines do is, so you've got cells called mast cells. When they are stimulated, they, in a particular way, they break open, they release histamine into your system.

Histamine then travels to the target cells. So you have something in your eye, the histamine will cause your eyes to water and tear up to wash it out.

If you eat something that's causing a problem, then you may create a lot of mucus trying to wash it out. If you get pollen in your nose, then the histamine will activate cells in your nose to release fluids to try to wash out the offending particles.

Okay? Now, if you do an antihistamine, it does not block the release of histamine. It blocks the uptake of histamine. So what happens? The longer you're on an antihistamine, the more histamine builds up in your system.

Histamine is very bad for your system. It increases dementia risk and a variety of other risks, and that's why it's so hard for people to get off of antihistamines, because when they do, suddenly all this built-up, backed-up histamine is going to affect them.

What we do is we work on the mast cells. We have a variety of formulas and supplements that make the mast cells less likely to break inappropriately.

Western Medicine vs TCM and Functional Medicine

Now, we want them to do their job. We just don't want it to be too weak. you know, in the mast cells, and so they get broken open too often. So we have things that bind the mast cells, which is a very, very safe way, in fact, much

safer than doing antihistamine.

In comparison to conventional Western medicine, Western medicine is very effective for fast symptom relief. You get pumped up with antihistamines, or maybe you do steroids, you're going to get very quick symptom relief.

I'm not against that. There are times when that can be critical. It can be life-saving. However, there is a reaction to that. Antihistamines, avoidance of allergens, you can do allergy shots, antacids if you're having gut problems.

All of those do have their own problems that they cause. In TCM, we treat the root cause. Now that takes a lot of diagnostic acumen, but we treat the root cause to create long-term balance And so we prevent allergies from happening by strengthening the body over time.

So that's not as quick as Western medicine. And sometimes I'll have people on antihistamines or even steroids and we'll start the TCM treatment to help them get weaned off of the Western medicines.

And that we do that with a lot of things, high blood pressure, diabetes, many things we treat side by side. Functional medicine, although in something now, we use a lot of enzymes like DAO, diamine oxidase for gut histamine.

And so when people have low levels, they have insufficient levels of diamine oxidase in their gut, it's almost like a sponge. They don't soak up the histamine that's been released.

And then if they have any problems with the lining of the gut so that those histamines leak out, then you have allergic reactions. So, DAO can be magical for people.

Functional medicine also has very, very advanced sensitivity and other testing. We do a lot, a lot of functional medicine testing. Leaky gut, small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, small intestinal fungal overgrowth, tons and tons of things.

So doing them side by side is fabulous. So strengths and limitations of TCM. It's holistic. That's a strength. It's personalized. That's a big strength.

And We actually follow the motto that doctors swear to follow, which is first do no harm. Now limitations, often the results are a little slower. You do need trained practitioners.

The diagnostic process, you really shouldn't be doing yourself because if you just go on ChatGPT or somewhere else and plug in some symptoms, you can get absolutely the wrong treatment principles.

So you do need a practitioner. It's not a replacement for emergency care, but can we use for somewhat urgent care, right? Someone has a sinus infection that's not horrible, then they could go to urgent care or they could come to us.

So TCM is very helpful, but it's not instant and it should not be considered a replacement for emergency treatment for severe allergies.

Conclusion and Closing Remarks

And remember, the use of functional medicine with TCM is very, very powerful. So I want to thank you. And in conclusion, remember TCM and functional medicine focus on creating balance.

They focus on getting to the root of the problem. and they focus on you as a unique individual. And we treat allergies as internal imbalances of either weakness or excess or a combination of both.

We combine herbs, acupuncture, and diet. It can be used alongside modern medicine and can be enhanced with functional medicine testing and supplements.

So thank you very much for watching and or listening. And please come back and see me again. In the meantime, be happy, be healthy. real clarity and balance can begin.

Visit AlamedaAcupuncture.com. That's AlamedaAcupuncture.com to learn more, explore our supplements, or book a call. We'd love to hear from you.