

Extraordinary Collector Benefits HFG

What is perhaps the West's best collection of live specimens of the plants used in traditional Chinese medicine has been built within the last five years by one plant lover, working virtually alone and without funding. The story of this accomplishment has been an inspiration to us at HFG; the results are now informing us as we determine which of the herb species are most useful to Northeast growers and their markets.

In 1990, Robert Newman was a second-year student at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. (The College was founded in the late 1970s to train practitioners of Chinese medicine, including acupuncture and herbalism, in a three-year post-baccalaureate program.) Robert noticed two small plots of land in front of the College building, each messy and overgrown with Mexican marigold, star jasmine and lavender. Being the kind of incorrigible plant maven who always keeps dozens of houseplants in his apartment, Robert decided to turn the plots of land into a demonstration garden for the herbs he was studying.

Five years after the College president gave him the go-ahead, Robert has over eight hundred species of medicinal plants. Only about 250 of these plants are listed in the standard reference work used in the West, Bensky and Gamble's *Materia Medica* (Revised ed. 1993, Eastland Press Inc., POB 12689, Seattle WA 98111). Others are closely related species which have been used medicinally but are less well known. For example, the species used for *Huang Qi* is cited in Bensky and Gamble as *Astragalus membranaceus*. There's also *Sha Yuan Ji Li*, the seed remedy, for which a different species of *Astragalus* is used (*A. complanatus* or *A. chinensis*). While this may seem confusing to Westerners, it indicates the richness and depth of Chinese herbalism, which evolved over thousands of years in different regions of China and involved many variations on many themes. Robert has five different species of *Astragalus* in his collection.

Besides being a real plant person, Robert is a matchless researcher/detective -- as he says, "Mom taught me how to find things." He used San Francisco's two main resources, the botanical garden of the University of California at Berkeley with its collection of medicinal plants, and the Strybing Arboretum library which has a section for nursery catalogs. In this way he combed through all the available commercial sources and also

More Books on Chinese Dietary Therapy

We found two books of special interest to our readers in Jeffrey C. Yuen's six-week course on Chinese Dietary Therapy this past November. (The course was sponsored by the International Tai Chi Institute and the Swedish Institute in Manhattan; contact HFG for more details.) Three other books on this subject were reviewed in the July 1995 issue of this newsletter. If you like our articles about food and diet, you'll really enjoy these books.

✓ *Native Nutrition: Eating According to Ancestral Wisdom*, by Ronald F. Schmid, N.D., 1987 & 1994, Inner Traditions International/Healing Arts Press, One Park Street, Rochester VT 05767, (800) 246-8648.

The author asserts that study of the traditional diets of indigenous peoples throughout the world, including anthropological and archaeological records, is our best route to understanding the relationship between food and physical health and healing. (Vegetarians take note, Schmid believes that some animal protein is necessary to support optimal human health.)

The nutritional quality of our food has been absolutely compromised by modern refining and processing including pasteurization, as well as factory farming's treatment of animals and the soil. Refined foods lead to actual physical degeneration within two or three generations; as evidence he summarizes the little-known research of Dr. Weston Price and also Dr. Francis Pottenger, two nutritionists whose work during the 1930s holds profound implications for contemporary dietary habits. (MORE BOOKS cont'd., p. 4)

contacted other specialists, collectors and botanical gardens for propagation materials. He found that many nurseries, particularly the British (a nation of plant lovers), sponsor collecting tours of exotic places such as China. England has a National Collections Program which focuses on certain genera, such as *Artemisias* and *Salvias*, then links collectors who trade within each group. So Robert has really gotten around the world, in a way that we at HFG can truly appreciate.

The most amazing part of this story is that he has accomplished all of this entirely without personal travel, without being computerized or on-line, and, most incredibly, without money. (Collector, continued on p. 4)

ANTACIDS AND THE EARTH SCHOOL

For all that's been said lately, you have to admire the U.S. health care industry in one respect. The business of health has managed to guarantee itself a steady supply of new customers. People spend billions on fake food (grown in dead soil and overprocessed), billions more for palliatives to quell the symptoms that result and ultimately, when disease becomes chronic, still more billions in futile attempts at a cure.

Americans are more often medicating themselves, partly because an ongoing relationship with one physician (who knows the patient well enough to counsel him or her) is an increasingly rare luxury in this age when HMOs and insurance companies rule. Factory health care, like factory schools and factory farms, ensures that people's bodies (like the students or the farm animals) will be even further removed from careful human attention.

Fortunately, we can step outside the assumptions of the Industrial Age, back into history, and retrieve an alternative viewpoint. Let's examine one example of self-defeating behavior -- the overuse of antacids -- through the lens of traditional Chinese medicine, in particular, the Earth School.

The Establishment's Answer: Still More Palliatives

In September of 1995 a "War on Heartburn" made front-page news in the *New York Times*. The article described how the big pharmaceutical companies are developing milder, over-the-counter versions of their ulcer drugs, which are displacing less expensive, less powerful antacids such as Tums, Maalox and Mylanta in the multibillion-dollar marketplace for stomach remedies.

The drug companies seized upon this tactic when the patent for Tagamet, a very popular prescription drug, was due to expire and its manufacturer Smith-Kline Beecham P.L.C. faced competition from generic drugs. Other pharmaceuticals rapidly followed suit, getting their own nonprescription versions rushed through the FDA even before Tagamet. The FDA unanimously approved the over-the-counter version of Zantac, the world's best-selling prescription drug, which is in this category, made by Glaxo P.L.C. Now, many prescription drugs are going over-the-counter with the FDA's full approval.

What's Happened to Our Guts?

The word *palliative* has a Latin root meaning "to cloak or conceal," and that's exactly what these drugs do. Antacids, as well as laxatives and other classes of over-the-counter drugs to which many people are addicted, have the effect of suppressing symptoms, the body's method for telling us that something's wrong. As Jeffrey C. Yuen says, antacids "silence the crying out of the body."

Most of the time these days, the root problem is not an infectious disease agent but rather our habit of living contrary to our natures and to Nature. Our modern medical problems are in the category of chronic degenerative disease, although infectious diseases are now on the rise even in industrialized countries because the potency of antibiotics is diminishing. The bugs are mutating into resistant forms faster than we can invent new bugkillers. (An analogous problem exists in industrial agriculture, with resistant bugs defeating pesticides.)

The Belly Fights Back

*"Your most grave belly was deliberate
Not rash like his accusers, and thus answered:
'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
'That I receive the general food at first,
Which you do live upon, and fit it is,
Because I am the storehouse and the shop
Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,
I send it through the rivers of your blood
Even to the court, the heart, to th' seat o' th' brain,
And, through the cranks and offices of man,
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins
From me receive that natural competency
Whereby they live.'"* Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Scene I, Act I

At least once before in the history of the human race, there was a violent, chaotic period when lifestyle diseases were prevalent and establishment medicine had become dogmatic and inadequate. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in China, during the Mongolian invasion, a few revolutionary doctors created new ways of looking at the human body and treating people. One of these revolutionaries (known as the Four Great Masters), was Li Dong-yuan, who founded a branch of Chinese medicine known to us, popularly, as the Earth School (*Bu Tu Pa*), more precisely as the School of Post-Natal Tonification.

The Earth School holds that the Spleen and Stomach (the organ/energy complex associated with Earth in Five Element symbolism) are central to human health. All chronic degenerative disease is due to internal weakness, originally of this particular organ system. Li believed that if the Spleen and Stomach are functioning normally, one is immune to external invasion of disease.

Proper functioning depends on lifestyle factors, primarily diet and emotional health. As Li wrote, "...if people are not moderate in food and drink, tax themselves unwisely, and resign themselves to their addictive likings and dislikings, their original qi will become stagnant and transform into fire. This is the cause of premature death."

Li also originated the concept of "yin fire," a disease factor that can slumber for a long time inside the body and then, for unknown reasons, erupt into devastating symptoms. If this pattern sounds familiar to you, rest assured that Li's ideas and herbal formulas are being scrutinized for new leads in the treatment of cancer, AIDS and other mysterious immune system disorders.

Of course, we cannot expect to find a Western-style "cure" if, as Li Dong-yuan said, these diseases are due to an unhealthy way of life. Our strategy must be preventive. In addition, we must now try to withstand the effects of widespread environmental pollution, including manufactured chemicals in the food chain, on a scale that Li would have found appalling.

The over-use of antacids is a key example of how our way of life is self-defeating. The Earth School holds that normal Stomach Fire (meaning the acids, enzymes and heat used in digestion) should be protected. One should, for example, avoid very hot, spicy or very cold food and drink. Antacids weaken the digestion by making it work harder. Such an alkaline substance diminishes Stomach Fire, but also has the effect of producing more Phlegm, leading first to congestion in the head. Then, if the practice of taking antacids becomes habitual, the accumulated phlegm leads to diaphragmatic constriction and shallow breathing which produces yet more Dampness, which gradually affects the Gall Bladder and eventually goes to the constitutional level and produces serious disease.

A heavy animal protein diet is considered too Yang -- meaning acidic, among other things. Add constant stress to that diet and you have a recipe for too much Stomach Fire. The Gall Bladder organ system is considered to be alkaline as a means of balancing Stomach Fire. But antacids cause the Gall Bladder to become even more alkaline, which leads to deposits in the body such as gallstones and arterial plaque.

How Do You Spell Relief?

If you suffer stomach pain and your regular doctor has no answer other than to prescribe antacids, you can seek alternative treatment. Chinese medicine offers treatments, including acupuncture, dietary therapy and herbal remedies. Also, you can take several steps all by yourself.

- Eat less animal protein and more locally, organically-grown vegetables.
- Eliminate coffee from your diet. Drink green tea instead, if giving up caffeine is too difficult. Green tea energizes you without the stomach-churning effects of coffee.
- Eliminate the use of aspirin.

- Avoid ice-cold drinks and food. Learn to like spring water at room temperature. Chill beer and white wine to 45-50°F, according to the European custom, rather than drinking it ice-cold.
- Bitter herbs induce beneficial secretions, soothe the lining of the gut, and reinforce digestive enzymes. Adopt the European custom of starting and/or finishing a meal with a shot of digestive bitters.
- Exercise and/or practice meditation or other techniques to relieve stress.
- Aging also diminishes normal Stomach Fire. Boomers beware, all the above will become imperative for us.

Resistance, Not Resignation

When people suppress their legitimate complaints every day, this style gradually becomes habitual, a preferred mode of dealing with the world. Perhaps it's easier to numb oneself rather than to confront external causes of discomfort. To trace one instance of stomach pain to its source, where shall we look? Bad food? Overuse of coffee, nicotine, or other drugs? How about too much noise or irritating visual stimulation, horrible traffic on the freeway, the necessity of showing up for a demeaning, underpaid job?

What Li Dong-yuan meant by the suppression of emotions surely includes our modern predilection to treat our bodies like machines and routinely suppress its "crying out" in order to conform to external expectations. Passivity, even a sense of victimhood, is reinforced by such resignation to "our addictive likings and dislikings."

If we suspect our pain is due to bad food, for instance, then rather than to berate oneself for bad habits why not question why junk food is so ubiquitous and so much cheaper than good food, and why we have so little leisure time to obtain and prepare good food. At least where food is concerned, consumer demand and, in the cases of the bovine growth hormone and food irradiation, consumer *resistance*, are actually starting to make some real improvements in the SAD (Standard American Diet).

Clearly our health depends on a more active and self-expressive stance toward life than antacids and other palliatives allow. ■ © 1995 Jean Giblette. References cited upon request.

Recommended Reading:

Li Dong-yuan's *Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach*, A Translation of the *Pi Wei Lun* by Yang Shou-zhong and Li Jian-yong, 1993 (Blue Poppy Press, 1775 Linden Avenue, Boulder CO 80304, 303-447-8372.