

FACIAL ACUPUNCTURE:

Necessity is the "Father" of Invention:

An Acupuncturist's Herbal Quest to Heal his Daughter's Skin

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Introduction:

It seems that every 5 minutes one encounters a television or other advertisement for yet another "miraculous" skin care product, the vast majority of them being proffered by the pharmaceutical companies; within this welter of commercial, readily available, remedies, it is difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. In my facial acupuncture seminars, I seek to illuminate my students and fellow practitioners as to the virtues of our herbal medicine, and I have sought to enhance the noticeable and effective results of facial needling with a supportive topical regimen that is rooted in the traditions of Chinese herbology.

It is important to remind ourselves that, from the perspective of Chinese medicine, the skin functions as an analogue to Oscar Wilde's famous "portrait" of Dorian Grey, which revealed the inner corruption of the man's soul despite his apparent *outward* physical perfection. Unlike Mr. Grey, we cannot hide this evidence of our own frailties at our convenience; it makes readily manifest an ongoing conflict between the immune system and a myriad of toxins, both dietary and environmental. The skin is justly regarded as the 3rd Lung, as it says in the *Nei Jing*; like the Lung, it filters impurities, preventing the body from absorbing these pollutants.

For most of us, skin blemishes and other related conditions are manifestations of acute conditions, transitory in their nature, and will respond to appropriate treatment. My colleague, Michael Arsenault, experienced an entirely different situation with his daughter, Emily, who was born with chronic, painful, eczema. Rather than subject her to a course of Western dermatological treatment, he sought a remedy for her suffering within the parameters of our natural herbal medicine. It is a most inspiring story:

SOOTHING EMILY'S SKIN

I was in my 7th year of practice when my beautiful daughter Emily was born with skin problems. As an acupuncturist and herbalist, I wanted to do everything I could to avoid harsh medicines for her. My wife was desperate to address the problem and consulted our pediatrician, who confirmed eczema and suggested topical steroids. I am not completely resistive to allopathic medicine, but I did not want to start my infant daughter down that slippery slope unless it was absolutely the last resort.

I asked my wife for a month and promptly got to work; I devoured every text upon within reach that related to natural skin care, coupled with traditional herbal formulas for eczema. Experimenting in my kitchen, I analyzed these time-honored formulas, endeavoring to find the common denominators. We tested all of them - first on ourselves, then Emily. I was desperate to find a safe, natural answer for my daughter and, intuitively, I knew I could.

It did not take long until I had formulated a salve that worked extremely well, made from a combination of beeswax, sesame oil and three Chinese herbs - Dang Gui (*Angelica sinensis*), Bei Zi Cao (*Potentillae chinensis*) and Bo He (mint). We slathered it on Emily's lesions daily and, gradually, miraculously!, the red bumps - on her face, behind her knees, and in her cubital creases - quieted and disappeared. She smelled like a sesame donut, but we didn't mind as she was happy and her skin was clear.

The formula worked so well for my daughter that I decided to share it with patients and colleagues with similar skin issues. Patients with sensitive skin reported that they had been able to wean themselves from long-term applications of topical steroids by using our salve. I began to realize that this particular herbal remedy that I had concocted just for our baby Emily might be able to help many more people.

We went through some growing pains. As more patients tried the product it became clear that people either loved or hated the smell of sesame oil. The smell was strong, and many people with nut allergies were afraid of sesame. I investigated other oils with similar properties and settled on olive oil, which was less pungent, and had a long history of topical applications. This solved one problem. I also discovered that certain patients felt the herbal smell of the salve was too "earthy"; we compensated by making a version infused with lavender essential oil.

Soothing Others' Skin

It was around this time that some remarkable testimonials started to arrive from sources beyond our immediate family circle. One of my favorites was from the parents of a 7 year old who had been similarly afflicted with severe eczema; they had tried everything available - even "\$200-per-tube 'new' drugs prescribed by his dermatologist" - with little or no improvement. They attested as to 7 years of disrupted sleep due to the child's constant itching and attendant skin infections. Both parents and child had expressed their reluctance regarding yet another product, because they had been repeatedly disappointed. Nevertheless, they decided to relinquish their skepticism and experiment with our salve; within two weeks, the itching had subsided and their son was symptom-free. Don't get me wrong; I do not believe we effected a "cure". But, the salve did alleviate his symptoms to such a degree that he, and his family, could now sleep through the night. Even I was astonished.

As I continued to study the gamut of skin syndromes, I recognized that the chemical ingredients in most soaps can be implicated in the occurrence of eczema and related ailments. Emily's skin could not tolerate the majority of "special" soaps specifically marketed for babies and sensitive skin. Most of these products contain extraneous toxic chemicals, like fragrances and sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS). So, once again motivated by necessity, I was compelled to create my own soap. As the herbs had worked so well in the salve, we chose to employ them again in our own bar soap with no color, no fragrance and just a few simple ingredients: saponified olive, avocado, coconut, and palm oils, plus Shea butter. Emily's skin continued to improve.

Although the feedback from our patients was uniformly positive, many requested that I consider re-packaging our bar soap in liquid form; they stipulated that they much preferred the convenience of a liquid soap for the shower. I performed similar research regarding soaps of this nature, and found a similar litany of harsh chemical toxicity; I wasn't really certain that I could fulfill this particular request. Thankfully, I didn't permit that to deter me.

I re-immersed myself in study, and began a similar round of experimentation. At length, I arrived at a certified organic liquid soap formulation - unscented, with no artificial colors or chemicals. The soap is comprised of a similarly mild base of saponified organic coconut, olive and jojoba oils, organic Guar Gum extract, aloe vera, with a little rosemary extract as a natural preservative. I then cooked 4 Chinese herbs - Sheng Di Huang (*Rehmannia*) Dang Gui (*Angelica sinensis*), Pu Gong Yin (dandelion) and Bo He (mint) in some extra oil; the addition of this mixture to the finished soap is what distinguishes this particular formulation. The herb-infused oil makes it a "super-fatted" concoction, the result of an older, non-industrial, soap-making technique that permits extra oils to float free in soap, rendering it more gentle and emollient. However, that free-floating oil has a

tendency to settle, so it is necessary to shake the bottle prior to usage; what this soap may lack in esthetic "appeal", it more than compensates for in its non-abrasive, non-toxic nature.

The Gift of Emily

As a parent, I cannot overemphasize the impact of a beloved child's suffering, and the torment that it induces. And, while I would not willingly have seen my Emily inflicted with her natal eczema, or re-live those anguished days in which no relief seemed at hand, the legacy of my frantic quest to "soothe" her skin has been remarkable. I have been motivated to re-examine the entire landscape of topical skin preparations - ones that we routinely employ, without recognizing their potential hazard. This led me to create a special moisturizer for my beautiful wife, one to which she can treat herself on a daily basis, without risk. My assiduous researches and experimentation have borne fruit in a range of similar formulations, which have helped me bring aid and comfort to many people.

People always ask me what is next. One of my favorite quotes from the *Dhammapada* says, "Our life is shaped by the mind. We become what we think." In my mind's eye, I envision myself continuing to create safe, natural, effective remedies, powered by Chinese herbs, to address that most delicate, vital, organ - the skin.

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