Herbal Medicine 3

Therapeutics 4.1
Treating Skin Conditions
Learning Outcomes

In today’s topic you will learn:

- An overview of the skin and its functions
- Useful herbal categories and rationales when treating the skin
- Specific treatments and formulae for a range of skin conditions
- Topical treatment of skin conditions
- Management of skin conditions
Functions of the skin

- Largest organ of the body, 1.5 – 2 square metres
- Provides a mainly dry, semi-permeable barrier against fluid loss
- Storage and synthesis of certain minerals and vitamins, e.g. Vit. D
- Excretion (perspiration)
- Temperature regulation & insulation
- Respiration & absorption – outermost 0.25- 0.4% exclusively supplied by external O²
- Water resistance, prevents vital nutrients being washed away
- Aesthetics and communication: issues around self esteem where skin is affected
Useful herbal categories

- **Alteratives, hepatics & diuretics**: clear heat from the blood and detoxify, liver, kidney & lymph
- **Astringents**: tighten and bind skin, improve resistance and prevent loss of fluids
- **Diaphoretics**: promote elimination (release the exterior – TCM)
- **Emollients**: external treatments to soothe, heal and cool
- **Demulcents**: moisturize and nourish
- **Rubifacients**: bring blood to the surface
- **Circulatory stimulants**: drive blood to the periphery
- **Nervines and antispasmodics**: relax and desensitize
- **Digestive tonics (bitters, carminatives, aperients)**: improve flow of nutriment, reduce phlegm & congestion, reduce autointoxication
- **Vulneraries**: heal broken and damaged skin
Alteratives

- **Arctium lappa**: cooling, bitter, diuretic, hepatic, anticatarrhal, immunomodulator; said to have an affinity with the skin; clears heat and nourishes the blood. Skin indications – eczema, psoriasis, urticaria

- **Berberis aquifolium**: cooling, bitter, depurative, blood and lymph cleanser, has an affinity with the skin; clears heat and dredges the liver. Skin indications – eczema, psoriasis, acne. Combine with Arctium lappa

- **Rumex Crispus**: cooling, hepatic, blood and lymph cleanser, laxative, iron tonic, blood nourishing. Traditional for skin problems, combine with Arctium, Urtica.

- **Urtica dioica**: neutral, hepatic, diuretic, antihistamine, antirheumatic, nutritive tonic. Combine with Rumex. Skin indications – urticaria
Alteratives

• **Smilax ornata**: alterative, antirheumatic, diuretic, diaphoretic. Skin indications – psoriasis and other autoimmune conditions

• **Echinacea spp.**: cooling, lymph cleanser, immunomodulator, antibiotic, anti-allergic. Skin indications – acne vulgaris, acne rosacea, any infected condition

• **Berberis vulgaris**: cooling, bitter, heat clearing, hepatic, antiseptic, laxative. Skin indications – eczema, infected conditions, MRSA.

• **Galium aparine**: cooling, alterative, lymph cleanser, diuretic, anti-cancer; skin indications – eczema, seborrhoea, itching
Diaphoretics

- **Achillea millefolium**: cooling diaphoretic, bitter, astringent, alterative, diuretic vulnerary; skin indications – rashes, abrasions, eczema, inflamed skin. Use the infusion as a fomentation or wash.

- **Mentha x piperita**: cooling diaphoretic, carminative, anticatarrhal, pectoral; skin indications – inflamed skin conditions. Use also externally as a cooling topical wash, or add the essential oil to skin preparations.
Emollients and Demulcents

- **Stellaria media**: demulcent, refrigerant; fresh leaf as a poultice for inflamed skin, itching, ulcers; add infusion to a bath for eczema and itchy skin

- **Calendula officinalis**: alterative, hepatic, female hormone balancer, vulnerary, emollient; topical use of the flowers (fomentation, lotion, bath) for healing broken or inflamed skin.

- **Glycyrrhiza glabra**: emollient, demulcent, hormone balancer, adaptogen, expectorant; topical for inflamed, dry skin, and hormonally challenged skin (e.g. at menopause – putative hormone replacement action)

- **Avena sativa**: nervive, anxiolytic, emollient, nutritive; add to baths for relief of itchy inflamed skin
Emollients and Demulcents

- **Aloe vera**: cooling, emollient, nutritive, demulcent, antimicrobial; topical use for inflamed irritated skin, burns and scalds, forms a protective coating on broken skin

- **Althaea officinalis**: cooling diaphoretic, demulcent, emollient, nutritive. Skin indications – eczema, hay fever, inflamed skin conditions; topically as a soothing cream or lotion

- **Glycyrrhiza glabra**: emollient, demulcent, hormone balancer, adaptogen, expectorant; topical for inflamed, dry skin, and hormonally challenged skin (e.g. at menopause – putative hormone replacement action)

- **Avena sativa**: nervine, anxiolytic, emollient, nutritive; add to baths for relief of itchy inflamed skin
Rubifacients and circulatory stimulants

- **Capsicum minimum**: stimulant, styptic, anodyne, carminative, rubifacient, warming diaphoretic; externally for stimulating peripheral circulation.
- **Zingiber officinale**: stimulant, carminative, anti-inflammatory, warming diaphoretic
- **Brassica spp.**: stimulant, diaphoretic, rubifacient, antirheumatic; mustard baths
- **Mentha x piperita**: essential oil used in many topical skin preparations
- **Urtica dioica**: raw leaves!
Nervines and antispasmodics

- **Scutellaria lateriflora**: nerve, antispasmodic, anti-hypersensitivity; add to formulae for eczema and psoriasis where stress is a factor

- **Hypericum perforatum**: nerve, anxiolytic, antidepressant, vulnerary, hepatic; internally to reduce stress and tension; externally to aid healing

- **Avena sativa**: nerve, anxiolytic, emollient, nutritive

- **Passiflora incarnata**: useful all-purpose antispasmodic, anxiolytic, sedative and hypnotic
Digestive herbs

- *Berberis aquifolium*
- *Berberis vulgaris*
- *Actium lappa*
- *Achillea millefolium*
- *Rumex crispus*
- *Rheum palmatum*: anthraquinone laxative, astringent, hepatic (liver dredger)
- *Aloe spp*: anthraquinone laxative, prebiotic, demulcent
Vulnerary herbs

- **Symphytum officinalis**: vulnerary, emollient, demulcent; traditional use for broken bones; contains allantoin (cell proliferator)
- **Borago officinalis**: similar to Symphytum, also adrenal restorative; traditional use for scabs, sores, ulcers.
- **Plantago major/lanceolata**: refrigerating alterative, anti-allergic, demulcent, diuretic; also contains allantoin
- **Prunella vulgaris**: astringent, styptic, tonic; internal and external use for healing
- **Hypericum perforatum**
- **Calendula officinalis**
- **Stellaria media**
Pathologies

- Eczema (various types)
- Psoriasis
- Urticaria
- Acne vulgaris
- Acne rosacea
- Fungal affectations
- Cellulitis
- Infective conditions – streptococcus and Staphylococcus
- Lichen planus and Scleroderma
- Skin cancers
Eczema and dermatitis

- Several different types, e.g. atopic, discoid, seborrhoic, varicose
- Most commonly encountered skin condition (atopic) affecting more than 10% of population
- Can be triggered by contact with an allergen, e.g. chemical, plant, metal etc.
- Stress is a causative factor
- Energetically, heat in the blood
- Link to small bowel dysbiosis and malabsorption
Eczema and dermatitis

➢ For atopic conditions, diet must exclude dairy products, sugars, alcohol, refined carbohydrates and food additives

➢ Stress management training and advice

➢ Topical treatments used with care – hypo-allergenic, non-oleic

➢ Herbal treatments feature alteratives, nervines and adaptogens, demulcents, nutritive tonics
Eczema and dermatitis

- Hoffmann: leaves and flowers are more gentle treatments (Trifolium, Galium, Stellaria, Urtica, Viola tricolor, Scrophularia); roots and barks for more intransigent cases (Berberis aq. & vulg., Arctium, Hydrastis)

- Mills: alteratives and depuratives + nervines and relaxants

- Emphasise internal treatments

- Combination: Berberis aq., Arctium, Scutellaria lateriflora, Scutellaria baicalensis
Eczema and dermatitis - topical

- Non-oleic salves and lotions (aqueous), essential oils (diluted); soothe, cool and heal
- Calendula
- Matricaria etc.
- Stellaria
- Avena
- Rosa
- Lavandula
Psoriasis

- Autoimmune condition
- 1.5% prevalence in UK
- 35% familial, genetic factors
- Can also be triggered by trauma to skin, alcohol abuse, staphylococcal infections and certain drugs (beta blockers, lithium, antimalarials)
- Red erythematous patches, with silvery scales
- Over production of epidermal cells
- Complication: psoriatic arthritis
- Conventional treatments: steroids, UV radiation, chemical suppression of epidermal cell production
Psoriasis – herbal categories

- Alteratives, hepatics, lymph cleansers, diuretics
- Anti-inflammatories
- Nervines, adaptogens (stress and anxiety exacerbate)
- Immunomodulators
- Digestive treatments (dysbiosis is a common catalyst)
- Vulneraries help to heal the skin lesions
- Emollients soften and soothe skin
- Astringents reduce heat and inflammation
- Antipruritics
- Diaphoretics
Psoriasis – herbs

- Hoffmann: woody alteratives – Arctium, Berberis spp. Rumex, Smilax; topically, Calendula, Plantago, Stellaria; anxiolyitics, verbena, scutellaria

- Murray and Pizzorno highlight the liver: Silybum marianum, Hydrastis canadensis; also dysbiosis (bowel toxaemia); Smilax spp. may bind bacterial endotoxins

- Mills: Galium (lymphatic alternative); Symphytum (evidence to suggest it promotes keratin dispersal)
Psoriasis – class exercise

- Design a herbal formula for a female age 38 suffering from chronic psoriasis with complication of psoriatic arthritis

- Justify your inclusions

- What naturopathic and lifestyle advice might you also give?
Acne

- Acne vulgaris – commonly affects young people between 12 and 24 (85% affected), mainly males. Discreet comedones with either white or black heads. Hormonal origin (testosterone sensitivity)
- Associated bacterial infection, purulent exudate
- Acne rosacea - affects older people, mainly women. Rash with small pimples, typically across cheeks and bridge of nose, sometimes chin
- Self esteem affected: link to anxiety and depression
Acne

- Diet: avoid cow’s dairy products, sugar, alcohol, food additives, highly heated fats (fried foods – chips and pizza!), refined carbohydrates.

- Topical treatments: washes with lavender, chamomile, calendula or rose water. Tea tree oil in 5-15% dilution. Avoid greasy or oleic preparations.

- Herbal categories: alteratives, hepatics, diuretics, antimicrobials and immune stimulants, hormone modulators, anti-inflammatories.
Acne - herbs

- Echinacea - herbal “antibiotic”, immunomodulator
- Galium – lymph cleanser, diuretic
- Iris versicolor – hepatic, diuretic (Hoffmann)
- Arctium – hepatic, diuretic, skin herb
- Berberis vulgaris – hepatic, heat clearing alterative, antimicrobial
- Vitex agnus castus – hormone modulator, regulates testosterone
- Baptisia tinctoria – anti-infection, alterative (combine with Echinacea)
Cellulitis

- Infection of deeper layers of the skin, usually entering through broken skin, e.g. injury, eczema
- Red, inflamed, swollen
- Risk factors: lymphoedema, intravenous drug use, compromised immunity
- Usually treated with antibiotics
Cellulitis - herbs

- Alteratives & lymph cleansers, antiseptics & antimicrobials, vulneraries
- Echinacea
- Galium
- Baptisia
- Calendula
- Phytolacca
- Berberis vulgaris
Strep and staph

Streptococcocal:
- Cellulitis
- Impetigo
- Sepsis

Staphyloccocal:
- Boils
- Abscesses
- Sepsis
- Impetigo
- MRSA

- Alteratives, antiseptics, lymph cleansing and -stimulating herbs (immunomodulators)
- Echinacea, Hydrastis, Berberis vulgaris, Galium, Phytolacca, Rosmarinus
- Topical: Calendula, Lavandula, Rosmarinus, Chamomilla/Matricaria
- Need to avoid spreading by touching the lesion
Lichen planus

Lichen planus is a non-infectious, itchy rash that can affect many areas of the body. It may have an autoimmune origin.

Affected areas can include:

- the arms and legs
- the mouth (oral lichen planus)
- the nails and scalp
- the vulva, vagina and penis
Lichen planus - treatment

- Alteratives (Arctium, Berberis aquifolium, Rumex, Urtica)
- Emollients (Aloe, Stellaria, Althaea)
- Immunomodulators
- Bowel cleansing (dysbiosis/autoimmune link)
- General detox protocols
Scleroderma

- Hardening and thickening of the skin or the connective tissues
- Autoimmune condition
- Local or systemic (systemic can also affect internal surfaces including arteries, heart and lungs)
- Female predominance
- Also associated with Raynaud’s Phenomenon, GORD and Sjögren’s Syndrome
- Vitamin D deficiency
Scleroderma - herbs

- Antirheumatics
- Anti-inflammatories and immunomodulators
- Alteratives
- Nervines and anodynes
- Curcuma longa
- Dichroa febrifuga (Chang Shan): research on “active” principle halofuginone demonstrated immunomodulatory effects on autoimmune mechanisms
  (Keller and Whitman, http://harvardmagazine.com/2012/05/ancient-herbal-remedy)
References and suggested reading