

The Herbal Approach to Ear Infections

Chronic otitis media, or ear infections, are becoming a far too common medical problem. Many young children go through cycles of pain, antibiotics, allergic reactions, diarrhea, yeast infections and eventually surgical intervention to place tubes in the ears. Understanding the dynamics of why this happens is the first step to breaking the cycle of chronic ear infections. Many medical researchers are starting to realize some of the things that traditional herbalists and healers have said about ear infections. The main problem is the modern western diet.

To start it must be understood that we are constantly surrounded by infectious agents everyday of our lives. If we are healthy our bodies fend off these infections in an immune response. As adults many things can stress our systems leading us to be susceptible to a cold or other infection. In a young growing child the most important factor is the digestive process. The human digestive system works best on simple easy to digest foods. The chemical processes of digestion work more efficiently when the stomach is warm. In a child the digestive system is immature and delicate, which is why we start with breast milk and slowly work up to more complex foods as the digestive process matures. Children do not all develop at the same rate and that process of food introduction needs to be adapted to the child.

Complex foods or too much food, introduced too early overload the digestive process making it inefficient. Herbalists call this "food stagnation" and if it becomes a regular situation the digestive process is believed to be damaged. In a child that means that the maturation of the digestive process is slowed, which hinders development and the immune response. The immune response is known through studies to be easily impacted by excess sugars. There is evidence that a meal high in sugar can shut down neutrophil immune response in a child for up to five hours. That means that a child who starts the day with a sugared cereal and follows it with juice and sugared snacks throughout the day has limited immune protection. From an Herbal medicine point of view chronic over feeding of a child, results in a damaged or "cold" digestion. This is seen in a dark dull complexion, clear runny nose, and diarrhea. When growth spurts and teething start, the body is ill prepared to provide the energy needed, further stressing the system. Food stagnation in a "cold" stomach results in blockage of heat energy in a growing child and an ear infection can result. The treatment is often antibiotics which do knock down the infection but also further damage the digestive process by killing beneficial gut bacteria. An inefficient digestive system means that the child is getting little nourishment from their food. The result is that the child is very hungry, trying to satiate the hunger with more food. The child returns to a heavy overly rich and sugary diet creating more food stagnation and thus preventing the digestion from recovering. As this cycle continues the immune system gets weaker, Allergic reactions to the antibiotics can result. The destruction of gut bacteria can lead to diarrhea and yeast infections.

Breaking this cycle is very important. It starts with what we feed our kids. A change in diet can be enough early

on to break this cycle. If the ear infections have become chronic, then herbs, which are extreme foods, are needed. The herbs have to be selected and formulated based on the symptoms of the child. This should be done by a nationally certified Herbalist. Some herbs relieve food stagnation, others help the digestive system, others have antibiotic/antiviral properties that knock down the infection without harming the beneficial bacteria. A strict simple diet will allow the digestion to catch up to where it should be.

For the child who has a problem with ear infections, a simple diet is needed. A simple easy to digest diet starts with breast milk. As the child grows, diluted soy formula or rice water can be used. When it is time to introduce solids it is best to start with simple cooked grain cereals such as rice, barley and oats. Cooked vegetables and soups can later be added. Water is always a good beverage. Fruit juice should be diluted and kept to a minimum.

Many foods that have become a common part of our culture should be eliminated for at least a year to allow the digestion to recover. The first food to eliminate is all dairy. Modern dairy foods are too heavy and rich. Remember that cows milk is designed to take a small calf to a several hundred pound animal in a very short time. The complex proteins are hard to digest. Parents concerned about calcium should know that some studies indicate that vegetables are a better source of calcium.

Because the chemical process of digestion needs to be warm to properly breakdown food, any food colder than room temperature should be eliminated. Overly processed, fried and meat containing foods are also very heavy. They also tend to have a high Hydrogenated oil or trans fat content. Hydrogenated oils are oils that have been chemically altered to be solid. They are found in frying oils, peanut butter and margarine. High sugar foods should be avoided. Raw vegetables, while high in nutrients, are hard to digest and should be kept to a minimum. Vegetables should be steamed to help with the breakdown process of digestion. Wheat is also hard on the immature digestion. This is partly due to modern breeds of wheat, but more importantly it is hard to find wheat products that do not contain dairy, yeast, or hydrogenated fats. Other things that should be a concern for all of us is exposure to preservatives, additives, as well as secondhand smoke.

This type of diet is very hard to stay on for two reasons. It is hard to find foods that don't contain added sugars or hydrogenated fats. Restaurant menus rarely have non fried foods for children. Grocery stores have lots of bright kid friendly packaging and toys attached to less than healthy foods. The other tough situation is that parents don't like to have to constantly say no to the wants of child. This process is a difficult one but it does pay off in a healthier child.



Bock Acupuncture & Herbal Medicine

Ancient wisdom for our modern age

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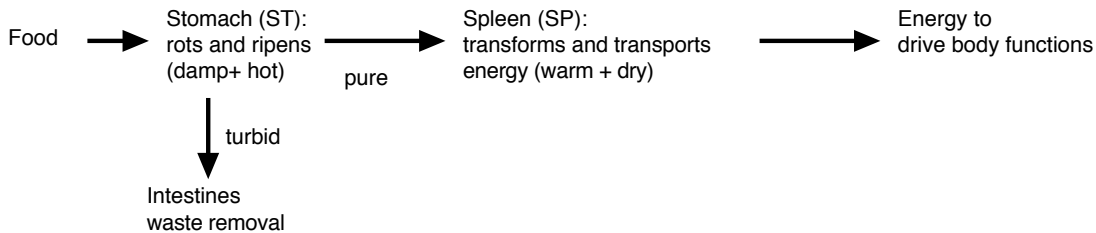
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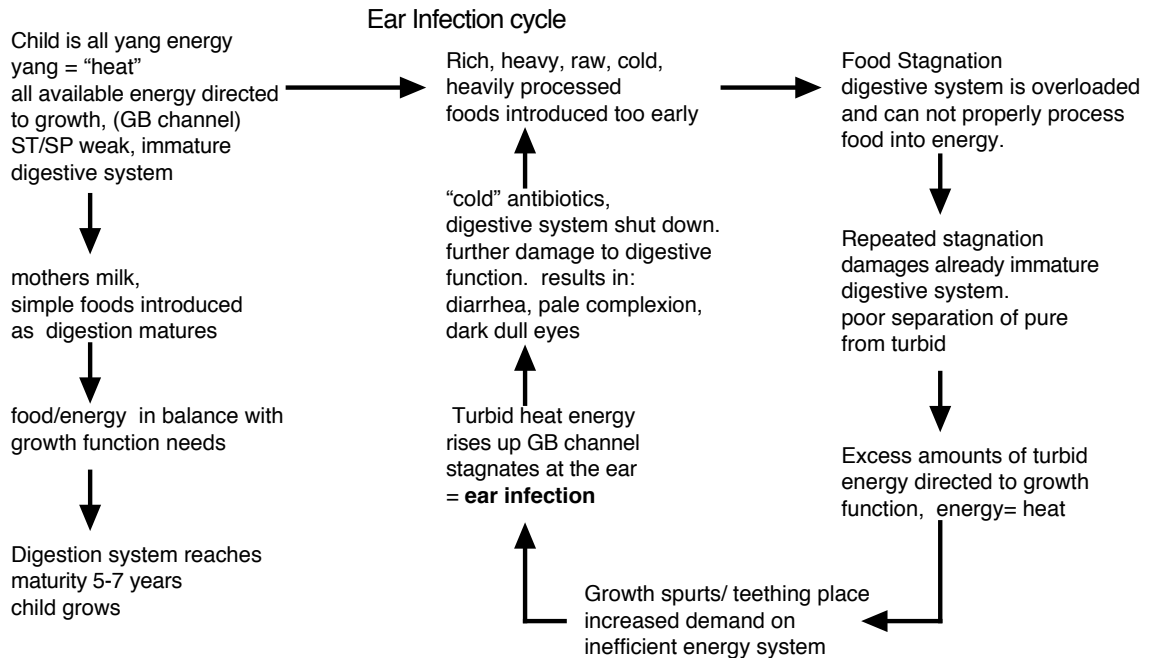
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Oriental Medicine Energetic Dynamics of Pediatric Ear Infections

Proper digestive function



Energy dynamics in children



Ear infection control

Foods to eat (adjust based on age)

- mothers milk
- water
- diluted soy formula
- rice water
- simple cooked grains (rice, corn, barley, oats)
- cooked vegetables
- diluted fruit juice (avoid orange juice)
- soup, soup like foods

Foods to eliminate for minimum of 1 year

- dairy (milk, cheese, butter, ice cream)
- cold, any food/drink colder than room temperature
- wheat and yeast containing products
- overly processed, fried foods, meats
- candy, soft drinks, high sugar foods, full strength fruit juice
- hydrogenated fats
- raw vegetables
- peanut butter

Recommended reading:

Keeping Your Child Healthy With Chinese Medicine By Bob Flaws
 Healing Childhood Ear Infections By Dr. Michael A. Schmidt



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