

Shen-Hammer Pulse Diagnosis and Overgrowth of Candida.

In this article I will describe some of the consequences an overgrowth of candida albicans and other yeast infections can have on our health and how to diagnose it via Contemporary Chinese Pulse Diagnosis/Shen-Hammer Pulse Diagnosis and Tongue Diagnosis. Also some treatment options will be suggested. Parasites are a common problem as well, but diagnosis is less conclusive.

Keywords: Shen-Hammer Pulse Diagnosis, Tongue Diagnosis, Overgrowth of Candida, Parasites, Sugar Addiction, Block to treatment.

When I first heard of candida yeast infection I was studying to become a certified reflexologist in Denmark in 1997. At that time it was a very 'popular' diagnosis; everybody had an overgrowth of candida. It might have been so, but it seemed to be a diagnosis a lot of practitioners of alternative health were giving to more or less all their clients. Looking back they might have been right.... When I later started to practice as an acupuncturist I had several clients referred to me from a colleague who was and still is a very skilled and experienced kinesiologist. All the referred clients had been on a cleansing diet aimed particularly at eliminating overgrowth of candida and parasites. They seemed to respond much quicker to acupuncture treatment and herbal patent remedies.

The Interpretation of Candida Albicans in Chinese Medicine:

The overgrowth of CA, being a yeast-like fungi in the body, gives rise to many symptoms. Some of the main symptoms according to Paul Pitchford (Healing with Whole Foods page 31 & 32) are; a feeling of heaviness and sluggishness, mental dullness, chronic tiredness, possible infections with yeasts and other micro-organisms, and pathogenic moisture such as oedema and excess mucous. Translating these symptoms to Chinese Medicine would suggest deficiency of Spleen Qi and partial breakdown of the Spleen's Transporting and Transforming function leading to the presence of Damp and Phlegm. Paul Pitchford also mentions chronic vaginitis or prostatitis, anal itching, bloating and other digestive problems, bad breath, extreme sensitivity to tobacco smoke and chemical fumes, frequent colds, craving for sweets and yeasted breads, recurrent fungal infections such as athlete's foot and low immunity in general. These symptoms not only suggest presence of Damp and Phlegm, but also additional Heat in various Organs combining with the Damp. Damp is also known to sink down and impair the optimal function of the Dai Mai (symptoms like vaginitis and prostatitis), and also interfere with the free movement of Qi that in turn causes friction and leads to the generation/production of Heat. Frequent colds also suggest the possibility of lowered immune system which in CM terms could refer to mainly a Yang Xu aspect, as the Protective Qi/the Wei Qi belongs to Yang. If the Candida overgrowth has become systemic, Paul Pitchford mentions it can - apart from any of the above mentioned symptoms - also include a scattered and unfocused mind, memory loss, mental derangement such as mania/depression and delusions, allergies to many foods and environmental substances. In CM terms these symptoms are mainly related to Damp and Phlegm obstructing the Heart orifices, but also a combination of Heat/Fire and Phlegm leading to Phlegm-Fire harassing the Heart making it unable to store the Shen/Mind causing mania/depression. The allergies could be from obstruction of Heat or Damp/Phlegm interfering with functions of various Organs making them less flexible. Another possible explanation of the allergies would very likely be the irritation in the mucosal lining of the intestines from the candida overgrowth causing leaky gut. Leaky gut is a well known cause of allergic reactions. From a Shen-Hammer Pulse Diagnosis point of view leaky gut is looked upon as a partial breakdown of the functions of the Spleen, and a primary cause of Blood Unclear. To summarize these different aspects, I suggest that Spleen-Qi deficiency leading to Damp is the predisposing factor, and this in turn can combine with Heat or Cold. Paul Pitchford does not describe or discuss possible findings on the Tongue or the Pulse.

According to Giovanni Maciocia (Diagnosis in Chinese Medicine, 2004, page 187-188) Candida Albicans is a physiological fungus which is found in the mouth and gastrointestinal tract. When it multiplies too rapidly it can produce opportunistic infections. He mentions some predisposing factors such as moist skin folds, obesity, diabetes mellitus, pregnancy, poor hygiene, humid environment, wet work occupation, use of broad-spectrum antibiotics and excessive consumption of sugar. According to G. Maciocia, fungal infections from a Chinese Medicine point of view are caused by Dampness which may be combined with either Cold or Heat, but more frequently Heat. G. Maciocia mentions that acute fungal infections are usually due to Damp-Heat, whereas chronic fungal infections are characterized by Dampness but they always occur against a background of chronic Spleen-Qi deficiency.

G. Maciocia does not describe or discuss possible findings on the Pulse, but does mention that Candida infections of the gastrointestinal system often manifest on the Tongue with *small, peeled patches with a white ring around them and a white-sticky coating in between*. G. Maciocia also has a note about candidiasis in regards to Tongue diagnosis (page 83, Obstetrics & Gynecology in CM) in which he states that the Tongue Coating can be very helpful in confirming a diagnosis of candidiasis. In this condition *the Tongue Coating is usually thin, white and sticky but rootless*.

These two findings on the Tongue are not quite consistent as peeled patches and rootless Coat are not quite the same, although a rootless Tongue Coat often precedes peeling of the Coat, both findings indicating the lack of necessary Qi to hold down the Coat on the Tongue (a marker for early stages of Yin Xu). What is similar though, is the white-sticky Coating, and this is an indication of the presence of Damp.

Parasites:

In Chinese Medicine parasites are categorized as a cause of disease under 'Miscellaneous causes of disease'.

It seems clear/evident to me from my practice that parasites are often an overlooked problem from GP's in Denmark. And to be fair I can understand it. For example the parasite *Enterobius vermicularis* giving rise to pinworm infections are difficult to diagnose via the standard test; approximately 50% of tests come back negative and it's very rarely diagnosed via stool samples. And this pinworm infection you really cannot miss noticing; you can see the worms if you dare looking at the stool in the toilet! So if such an obvious worm infection can be missed when testing a stool sample, it's not difficult to imagine that diagnosis of worms in general is very easy to miss or overlook. This probably has to do with the reproduction cycle of parasites and when the egg-laying process is happening.

Further investigation of Pulse and Tongue findings:

In 2006 I finished a dissertation about this topic. At that point I couldn't find any papers about pulse findings and overgrowth of candida. I created a study with the help of another CCPD instructor - Scott Tower. I divided clients into two groups; one group had been through a candida cleansing diet and had no overgrowth according to the kinesiology test, and the other group had substantial overgrowth according to the kinesiology test and hadn't started a cleansing diet yet.

In terms of tongue findings the result was a bit surprising. In the group with substantial overgrowth we saw the two types of coating suggested by Maciocia, but also one client with just a bit of a dusky coat on the root. In the group with no overgrowth we also saw a sticky coat, but it was not rootless. So it seemed that what distinguished the two groups was whether or not the coat was rooted. It leads to the conclusion in terms of tongue findings, that one can have overgrowth of candida without the two suggestions by Maciocia, but if found it can confirm a diagnosis of candidiasis.

Pulse findings: The main difference between the two groups was seen on the middle/guan positions. Actually the only signs that stand out as a marked difference are signs of more advanced Qi Xu at the middle/guan positions at Organ depth such as: Reduced Substance, Early Separation, Feeble/Absent, Change in Quality, larger change in Intensity/Amplitude and more so on the Right side.

So to summarize 'the standard client with substantial candida overgrowth' in terms of the combined Pulse and Tongue presentation:

- A Pulse with Slow to Normal Rate with fairly advanced signs of Qi Xu on Right and/or Left Middle/Guan Pulse Position at the Organ depth such as Reduced Substance or worse including change in quality.
- The Tongue will be Pale and Swollen, and it's likely, but not a must, that the Coat is White, Sticky and Rootless and/or has small peeled patches with a white ring around them and a white-sticky coating in between.

An extra bonus that confirmed this conclusion came a few months later. All the participants in this study were offered free acupuncture at a later date. So I was lucky to see all of the clients from the group with substantial overgrowth after they had finished the cleansing diet. At that point the kinesiology test showed no or just a little overgrowth. And with no exception the middle/guan positions had stabilized at the Organ-depth; none presented with any of the above Qi Xu findings.

Parasites:

I looked at that in the study as well. But I couldn't find any specific relationship between clients with parasites (diagnosed via kinesiology) and Pulse or Tongue findings.

Judging from my clinical (work)/experience especially the last five years, I have found signs on the Pulse that very often - also confirmed via a kinesiology test - correspond to parasites.

So far the most consistent sign is a Slippery quality at the Left Middle/Guan Position at the Organ-depth that comes and goes over time; so one week LMP is Slippery at the Organ-depth, next week it's not, then back the following week and so forth. I think this coming and going of the Slippery quality on the Liver position, has to do with the reproduction cycle and when the egg laying process is happening. When I see this pattern I often refer to a kinesiologist for a check-up. In most cases the test is positive for parasites. So far I haven't been able to spot particular signs on the tongue that suggests parasites.

Block to treatment?

When I first came across the idea that overgrowth of candida or parasites could be a block to treatment was reading Paul Pitchford's book 'Healing with Whole Foods'.

When I now look at the common Pulse picture that seems to represent substantial overgrowth of candida, it seems to make even more sense. The Pulse suggests fairly advanced Spleen Qi deficiency, so the obvious treatment principle would be to strengthen the Spleen either with acupuncture or with herbs. Herbs that strengthen the Spleen would often be sweet and that could cause even more overgrowth. But again it appears to be the overgrowth that weakens the Spleen to such a large extent, so focus should probably be on eliminating the overgrowth instead. Anyway, that has been my main focus and by large with good clinical results.

Treatment of candida overgrowth and parasites:

I have found certain supplements very useful to eliminate the overgrowth of candida and parasites. As a standard recommendation to all clients, I suggest Probiotics in order to rebuild healthy gut flora and protect against further growth. Some brands of Probiotics have tailored special combinations of strings of gut flora for specific purposes. In Europe probiotics from NDS (Nutrient Delivery System) and Udo's are available.

To eliminate overgrowth of candida I most often use extract of oregano, especially NDS Origanox which is well tolerated by most clients. Other possibilities are extract from olive leaves or extract from grapefruit seeds.

It's quite important also to avoid Damp-forming foods. There's an overlap between Chinese Medicine and a western approach when looking at foods to exclude. Basically all Damp and Damp-Heat forming foods should be avoided as much as possible for a period of time, especially sugar, drinks that contain sugar, wheat_bread, alcohol etc. Most clients with substantial overgrowth of candida crave sugar, some are very dependent on sugar, and some would be classified as sugar-addicts or sugar-junkies. For these clients I often find it very useful to recommend the two medicinal mushrooms Shitake and Maitake (Japanese names). They have a stabilizing effect on blood sugar levels and also have an anti-candida-effect.

For a majority of clients Xiao Yao San is also prescribed. It revives the function of the Spleen, resolves Damp, levels/harmonizes the Liver and nourishes Blood, and it addresses the Middle Jiao very well. To eliminate parasites I often recommend either Green Black Walnut extract or Wormwood (also known as Qing Hao in Chinese herbal medicine). They are Cold in nature and are less well tolerated; I find it sometimes necessary to build up resources before eliminating parasites. In these cases Probiotics are always recommended as a support to the intestinal lining.

The treatment period varies, but it often takes from 1-6 months.

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