

Han Fa: The Sweating (diaphoretic) Method

By Cheng Guopeng Scholar, Qing Dynasty

Cheng Guopeng is one of the seminal scholar-physicians of the early Qing dynasty.

Sweating means: dispersing. The classic states: “If the pernicious qi lodges within the skin/hair layer, sweat it out.” And another passage points out: “If the body turns burning hot, sweat will pour out and the condition will naturally be alleviated.” However, in daily practice we encounter many situations where the sweating method has not been used or used inappropriately. For instance, some patients should be sweated and are not sweated. Others should not be sweated but are sweated. Others should be sweated yet cannot be sweated and are nevertheless forcefully sweated. Others again should be sweated yet cannot be sweated, but on the other hand cannot not be sweated, and are thus inappropriately prevented from finding a proper way to sweat. And finally, others should be sweated, yet the sweating method is not directed at the appropriate meridian, since some doctors do not differentiate between diaphoretic herbs and only know how to make the patient sweat without knowing anything about the necessity and principles of astringing. It is precisely these scenarios that we have to keep in mind when we are dealing with sweating matters. And what exactly, do I mean by that?

When a wind cold syndrome first afflicts a person, there is the typical headache, fever, and aversion to cold; the nose is stuffy, the voice raspy, and the body painful. This is a clear-cut case where the disease lodges in the skin/hair layer, and this condition should definitely be treated by employing the sweating method. If the person is not sweated in due time or not appropriately sweated, the pores will become

***Translated by
Heiner Fruehauf***

jammed, the intricate connection between the nutritive (ying) and protective (wei) qi layers will shut down, and the pernicious influence will enter the body deeper and progress from layer to layer. This is what I refer to as cases that should be sweated but are not sweated.

There are, however, several situations where the patient also suffers from headache and fever, just like in the case of a wind cold, but the symptoms arise for different reasons, therefore requiring different treatment methods:

There are those with headache and fever that appear exhausted and without physical strength, the nose is not stuffed, the voice is not raspy, and there is a weak and deficient pulse. This must be interpreted as an internal injury of Original Qi.

Or there are those sex maniacs who have exhausted their yin essence, manifesting in symptoms of internal heat and afternoon fevers; their pulse is usually fine and rapid and without force.

Or there are those suffering from food injury that complain about a stuffy sensation in the chest and diaphragm regions, regurgitation of acid, and belching of foul odors. They usually experience tidal fevers in the afternoon and exhibit a tight pulse in the first position.

Or there are those with a heavy head and cold extremities caused by cold phlegm, those with internal dampness causing swelling in the lower extremities, those with internal and external

abscesses, those with coagulation of stagnating blood, those with wind-heat and damp-heat disorders, and those with spontaneous sweating caused by a summer heat stroke. All of these patients experience alternating chills and fevers, very similar to an externally contracted wind cold syndrome but actually of quite a different nature. If these kinds of patients are mistakenly sweated, all kinds of secondary symptoms will emerge! This is what I meant by sweating people that ought not be sweated.

sweated the fluids will dissipate, and there will be constipation and delirious talk.

Or those with a Shaoyin syndrome suffering from cold extremities, but with no sweat. If we force the sweat in this case, we almost certainly cause bleeding and heaven knows from where it will come shooting out; from the ears or eyes, maybe, or from the nose or mouth. This condition has traditionally been referred to as “juejie”--blood coagulating in the cold feet

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Also, some patients belong to the category of external affliction and should be sweated, but since there is qi movement to the left or to the right or below or above the navel, they cannot be sweated. The classic states: “If there is qi movement to the right, we cannot sweat; if sweated, the patient will start bleeding and become thirsty, grow restless, and vomit as soon as s/he drinks fluids; if there is qi movement to the left, the patient cannot be sweated; if sweated, s/he will turn dizzy and sweat incessantly, and the muscles and tendons will shiver and shake. If there is qi movement above, we cannot sweat; otherwise the qi will rush upwards and attack the heart. If there is qi movement below, we cannot sweat, otherwise there will not be any sweat at all, and the patient will grow extremely restless at heart, the bones and tendons will hurt, the vision will grow blurred, there will be vomiting as soon as s/he eats something, and the tongue will be unable to extended from the mouth.”

There are also those with a deep pulse and a dry throat; in this case the disease has already entered the interior, and if such a person is

below and leaking out above. It is a condition that is extremely hard to correct again.

Or those suffering from a Shaoyin cold invasion, whom we naturally cannot sweat, either; otherwise those patients will experience extreme chills and curl up in bed, yet completely unable to warm themselves.

Or those with a weak pulse in the first position, who also cannot be sweat; otherwise this will lead to severe loss of yang. Similarly, those with a weak pulse in the third position cannot be sweat either; otherwise this will lead to a severe loss of yin.

Or all those who have suffered great blood loss cannot be sweat; otherwise those patients will assume a dull stare and their forehead will cave in.

Or those with painful urination cannot be sweat; otherwise intestinal bleeding might occur.

Or those with skin boils cannot be sweat; otherwise they will go into spasms.

Or those with a cold invasion lodging in the Shaoyang channel cannot be sweat; otherwise they will go on a delirious rampage.

Also, deficient people suffering from a deadly disease or menstruating women cannot be sweat. If these types of patients are forcibly sweat, all kinds of secondary problems will emerge. This is what I meant by “should be sweat but cannot be sweat, yet nevertheless being forcefully sweat.”

And what about diseases that cannot be sweat, yet cannot not be sweat? There are still ways. The Wind Cold Rhyme, for example, notes: “If there is movement of qi, take Lizhong minus *Atractylodes*.” This essentially means to prescribe Ginseng and Ginger Combination (Lizhong wan), taking out the *Atractylodes* and adding some diaphoretics, thereby protecting the original qi on the one hand and getting rid of the pernicious qi on the other.

Zhang Zhongjing, author of the *Shanghan lun*, uses Ephedra and Gypsum in Ma-huang and Apricot Seed Combination (Ma xing shi gan tang) or Pueraria, Coptis and Scute Combination (Gegen huangqin huanglian tang) to address pernicious heat that has advanced to the interior, while the original surface condition still waits to be relieved. This is an approach that combines the internal heat clearing and surface relieving methods.

Further, for Taiyang syndrome that is atypically accompanied by a fine and sunken pulse, or for Shaoyin syndrome being atypically accompanied by fever, Zhang suggests Mahuang and Asarum Combination (Mahuang fuji xixin tang). This approach combines the center warming and surface relieving methods.

For Shaoyang wind invasion, he recommends Minor Bupleurum Combination (Xiao

chaihu tang) plus Cinnamon. This approach harmonizes the central layer between exterior and interior while relieving the surface at the same time.

For patients with a yang deficient constitution, Li Dongyuan suggests Ginseng and Astragalus Combination (Buzhong yiqi tang) plus surface relieving herbs.

For patients with a yin deficient constitution, Zhu Danxi uses *Cnidium* and Tang-kuei Combination (Xiong gui tang) plus surface relieving herbs.

All of these methods and formulas are extremely well designed! To bring the gist of these formulas to the point: all yang deficient patients should be sweated only if accompanied by herbs that tonify the center. All yin deficient patients should be sweated only if accompanied by herbs that tonify their yin. All patients with heat symptoms should be sweated only in combination with herbs that clear internal heat. All patients with severe cold should be sweated only while at the same time warming the meridians. All patients with food related problems should be sweated only in combination with herbs that resolve stagnating food.

If patients suffer from a heavy duty cold and appear to have a strong constitution, they should be sweated heavily: use Ma-huang Combination (Ephedra Combination: Mahuang tang). If the condition is light and patients display a deficient constitution, they should be sweated only lightly: use *Cyperus* and *Perilla* Formula (Xiangsu san).

Also, consider that the regions of the Southeast are different from those in the Northwest: in the Southeast flowers bloom in the middle of winter, and there is only little frost and snow.

The people living in this type of environment usually have a more delicate constitution, and their pores tend to be hollow and wide open. If you treat them with diaphoretic herbs, use them only if precisely directed at their particular symptoms, and never use them too heavily. As a Southerner, I often treat a beginning cold with Cyperus and Perilla Formula plus Schizonopeta, Siler, Cnidium, Qin-jiao, Manjingzi, and a variety of other herbs. One dose is usually enough, and if the problem is of

I have chosen to introduce here in a systematic manner are truly the best. They are the proper way of sweating.

Also, we should be aware that disorders of the three yang stages are located within different layers, and therapeutic action should thus follow a certain order. If the condition is located in the Taiyang layer and you disperse the Yangming layer, you are already one step off the mark. If the disease is in Taiyang/Yangming and you

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a more severe nature, then two doses can do the job. This method always works. Prescribing a heavy-duty Ephedra-based formula, however, has not happened more than twice in my long career as a doctor. We can see, therefore, how it is of the utmost importance to adjust our use of herbs to the particular geographical environment we are living in.

Now, as I have just outlined above there are a variety of time-honored methods to treat special cases where our standard surface condition is accompanied by symptoms of yang deficiency, yin deficiency, heat, cold, or food stagnation. Keep in mind, however, that following the suggestions of the ancient masters means especially to adhere to their treatment principles, not to the rigid use of their exact formulas. We always have to adjust these formulas according to the specific frame of time, space, and individual symptoms; also, stay flexible with the amounts of herbs used. Then your therapy will always be successful.

Keep in mind that all of these methods are rooted in clinical experience, and the ones that

relieve Shaoyang, then you practically entice the robber to penetrate deeper into the house. If the disease is in two meridians at the same time, but you only focus on treating one, you are overlooking the other. And if the disease is in three meridians at the same time and you are treating only one, you are overlooking two. If the disease is in one meridian and you treat two or three, then the pernicious qi easily traverses over to the other layers treated.

If there is a Taiyang syndrome without sweat, Ephedra (Combination) is the primary approach. If there is a Taiyang syndrome accompanied by sweat, Cinnamon (Combination) comes first. Pueraria (Combination) is the prime remedy for the Yangming affliction, and (Minor) Bupleurum (Combination) for the Shaoyang affliction. All of these are unchangeable treatment methods.

Qiang-huo Nine Combination (Jiuwei qianghuo tang), on the other hand, treats internal and external heat problems at the same time and addresses afflictions of the three yang and the three yin stages simultaneously. From the very

beginning, this formula was not designed to address just a simple Taiyang affliction. There is also Bupleurum and Pueraria Combination (Chaige jieji tang) which is designed to approach spring and summer fevers from the inside, gradually pushing the condition outside; this type of patient exhibits no aversion to cold, but pronounced symptoms of thirst. If the patient is in the early stages of a wind cold, suffering from the typical chills and failing to exhibit thirst symptoms, then this formula is not appropriate.

Furthermore, for a wind invasion accompanied by sweat we would regularly use Cinnamon Combination; for a summer heat stroke accompanied by spontaneous sweating, however, we cannot use this formula. If we prescribe Cinnamon Combination in this case, the pernicious heat will grow stronger and stronger and the severity of the condition will increase.

In general, if we use the dispersing method for summer heat syndromes in an undifferentiated manner, the patient is bound to suffer an even more pronounced loss of fluids (which has caused the problem in the first place). This has traditionally been called “double exhaustion”, a condition brought about by the maltreatment of dampness related fever, and which frequently ends in death.

Ancient doctors thus designed formulas based on Atractylodes and Siler to treat wind invasion (such as Jade Screen Powder: Yuping feng san); and they designed Benefit the Source Powder (Yiyuan san) and Elsholtzia Combination (Xiangru yin, Xinjia xiangru yin) to treat summer heat injuries. In this manner, they avoided the risk of breaking one of the “don’t do’s” that play such a crucial role in the treatment of the three yang stages, and this is really an excellent move.

Most doctors, moreover, may know about calming a fever by dispersing, but they usually do not know how to eliminate a fever by astringing. If there is no sweat, sure, we have to disperse. But if there is too much sweat, then we have to astringe. And by astringing I don’t mean using herbs like Schizandra and Zizyphus, but simply that every disease has an origin and that every sweat has a source. It should be the primary goal of every therapy to alleviate those root problems, and the sweat will disappear by itself. If a pernicious wind, for instance, injures the protective qi layer (wei qi) and spontaneous sweating ensues, it is best to use Cinnamon Combination to harmonize the ying and wei layers, to dispel the wind, and the sweat will stop automatically.

Or if there is sweat caused by pernicious heat penetrating the interior--hot qi generating steam just like the scenario in a boiling pot where water will eventually trickle down the sides--then this is definitely not a deficiency symptom. In this particular situation we must clear the heat with Gypsum Combination (White Tiger Combination: Baihu tang) immediately. If the pernicious influence has already coagulated inside and the patient is unable to pass stool, we have to purge with Major or Minor Rhubarb Combination (Da chengqi tang, Xiao chengqi tang). In this way the heat qi will retreat and the sweat will stop by itself!

This scenario seems similar to sweating caused by summer heat stroke. Summer heat, however, weakens the qi and is thus a pernicious influence that induces deficiency; it can only be tackled by the simultaneous employment of the heat clearing and tonification methods. Cold, on the other hand, harms the body’s material structure and is known as a pernicious influence inducing excess. Since the heat of the Rhubarb

Combination symptom complex has originally been caused by cold, the heat clearing method must in this case be combined with the urgent purging method in order to stop the sweat.

Also, there are those situations when a patient was dispersed too severely, causing excessive sweating and severe loss of yang; the body begins to shake and the patient collapses. The appropriate treatment for this particular situation is Vitality Combination (Zhenwu tang), which makes an excellent rescue remedy. This scenario is similar to the spontaneous outbreak of cold sweat following a cold invasion, but we have to distinguish it by all means from the kind of sweating that is caused by internal heat!

Furthermore, for Shaoyang syndrome accompanied by slight perspiration in the head region or by night sweats, Minor Bupleurum Combination is the appropriate formula to use. For dampness related sweating in the head region, however, we should use Minor Pinellia and Hoelen Combination (Xiao banxia jia Fuling tang). And for people with a deficient constitution who frequently suffer from spontaneous sweating, night sweats, and related symptoms, we can prescribe tonic formulas such as Ginseng and Longan Combination (Guipi tang), Ginseng and Astragalus Combination, Tang-kuei and Ginseng Eight Combination

(Bazhen tang), or Ginseng and Tang-kuei Ten Combination (Shiquan dabu tang). Prescribe these formulas according to the individual symptom profile, and experience the marvelous ways of employing them; to be sure, they are not always the obvious ones. In this manner, any problem can be alleviated.

So this is it: directly address the particular meridian afflicted when sweating a patient, fine-tune your herbs according to the specific symptom complex, and know when to disperse and when to astringe.

Indeed! All diseases start out as a wind cold. It is always a wind cold that penetrates the body first, and if we sweat the surface appropriately, which disease could resist? On the other hand, if the sweating method is not applied or wrongly applied, calamity will follow! How could we thus dare to declare sweat and sweating an easy matter?

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Heiner Fruehauf