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Ayurveda

Urticaria—like most skin rashes that are a result of the inflammatory system gone awry—is considered primarily a *pitta* disorder in Ayurveda. Some *vata* imbalance also occurs, because *vata* moves *pitta* to the periphery (skin) of the body, and *kapha* is disturbed¹ from a buildup of immune components in local areas around the hives. In Sanskrit, *urticaria* is known as *sheetsa pitta*.^{2,3}

Pitta is the quality of transformation that occurs in nature and in organic living beings. *Pitta* has the qualities of fire and water: sharp; somewhat in motion; hot; and acidic. Together, these qualities transform matter, as occurs in cooking and in chemistry. In the body, the transformational processes are *pitta*: digestion and assimilation in the gut; detoxification in the liver; and, on the cellular level, conversion of light into vision in the eye, conversion of mind thoughts into actions, and interface of chemicals and light with the skin. Skin and inflammation are ruled by *pitta*, and anyone with *pitta* in excess will experience imbalance in one of these bodily transformative processes, such as hyperacidity, hepatitis, dry eyes, fiery personality, hemorrhoids, and/or skin conditions. The treatment goal is to lower the *pitta* in the body.⁴ The question is: How much should the *pitta* be lowered?

A person's baseline constitution during optimal health states consists of an individual combination of *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. *Pitta* should be lowered to a patient's optimal state. If a person's baseline state (*prakriti*) contains more *pitta*, that person can also tolerate a higher amount of *pitta* in the environment, so it is necessary to lower the patient's *pitta* just enough so it matches the level of the person's *prakriti*,⁵ knowing that the patient has an inherent tendency toward more transformative processes. A patient with lower baseline *pitta* requires more extraction of *pitta* out of the body to bring that patient's *pitta* level to that lower baseline zone.

Given that *pitta* is sharp, hot, and acidic, I lower *pitta* by prescribing fresh, cool, and sweet substances. Dietary recommendations include fresh, sweet cooling fruits; and sweet and bitter vegetables, such as cooked carrots and beets, cilantro, cucumbers, green beans, and squash; as well as oats, rice, al-

mond milk, and freshwater fish. Cooling spices, such as fennel and coriander, mixed in water can be sipped throughout the day. Eating from silver cups and utensils cools the body. Coconut oil can be rubbed on the scalp and cools the body. Spraying rosewater on the hives is instantly cooling and provides relief. Noncompetitive sports will also lower *pitta* and improve circulation. Walking during moonlight cools the senses.

Reducing heat, inflammation, and acidic elements in the body will rid the body of excess chemicals and factors that cause imbalances in *pitta* and, thus, restore balance toward a person's overall baseline constitution.

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Integrative Approach

Hives, or urticaria, is an allergic reaction to various antigen triggers, causing raised welts called "wheals" on the surface of the skin. The wheals can be red or white in color; and they can be itchy and/or painful. In acute cases, the wheals tend to appear and disappear suddenly in response to antigen exposure, particularly dietary or drug-induced exposures. Chronic urticaria however, can last up to 6 months or longer, and research suggests that autoimmunity activates ongoing mast-cell degranulation.¹

Allopathic treatments—In Western medicine, first-line treatments for urticaria include antihistamine and steroid medications. Antihistamines such as Benadryl[®] (diphenhydramine) or Claritin[®] (loratadine), as well as oral corticosteroids and other agents, are often used.² Antihistamine drugs alleviate symptoms by blocking release of histamines, while corticosteroids reduce inflammatory chemicals and suppress immune reactions. These drugs can provide temporary relief but can also cause side-effects and do not help modulate overactive immune responses or address other underlying factors that cause urticaria symptoms.

Integrative treatments—Possible underlying factors involved in the development of chronic and acute urticaria, toward which holistic treatments may be targeted, include:

*Sharma M, Singh G. A study on the prevention and cure of *shbitapitta* with *udardaprashamans churna* and *rasayana* [MD thesis]. Jamnagar, India: IPGTRA, 1989.

- Immune dysregulation
- Intestinal dysbiosis and "leaky gut" related to food allergies
- Chronic inflammation
- Oxidative stress
- Latent infection.

Dietary changes and immune-modulation therapies—Numerous published studies suggest that both acute and chronic urticaria can be related to food allergies.³ A gluten-free diet and other antiallergenic diets have successfully reduced inflammation and immune responses in urticaria as well as in autoimmune conditions. Immune regulation can also be achieved with immune-modulating therapies, such as low-dose naltrexone,⁴ and Bacillus Calmette–Guérin vaccine,⁵ that can be used to address chronic or recurring urticaria.

Botanical therapies—Botanicals that reduce inflammation, combat oxidative stress, and treat underlying infections, particularly in the intestines, can be effective against urticaria. Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) leaf, yavani (*Trachyspermum ammi*) seeds, Chinese foxglove (*Rebmannia glutinosa*) root, red peony (*Radix paeoniae rubra*) root, honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) flower, chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) flower, peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) leaf, and boswellia (*Boswellia carterii* or *B. serrata*) gum can be used.⁶

Acupuncture—Published research suggests that chronic and acute cases of urticaria can be treated with acupuncture. Acute urticaria has been ameliorated with stimulation of the following acupoints: LI 111; Sp 10; Sp 6; and Sr 36. Injection of vitamin B₁ into these points also was effective.⁷ Research suggests that chronic urticaria has also been treated effectively with acupuncture, which works to regulate serum immunoglobulin E, resulting in favorable modulation of immune function.⁸

Mind–body therapies—Hives and other allergies can be ameliorated with mind–body exercises, such as mindfulness meditation. Mind–body practices help to calm an overactive immune system, while supporting greater adaptation and tolerance to one's environment on all levels: physical; mental; and psychospiritual.

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Evidence-Based Systematic Review Results

The Natural Standard Research Collaboration (www.naturalstandard.com) systematically reviews data on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Natural Standard does not practice or recommend specific therapies, but uses comprehensive and reproducible methodologies to create objective and reliable information for patients and health care professionals. Based on an evaluation of the literature, CAM treatments that may be beneficial for urticaria include (but are not limited to) acupuncture, prebiotics, probiotics, and vitamin B₁₂.¹

Acupuncture—In a clinical trial of patients with obstinate urticaria, the therapeutic effect of acupuncture plus point-injection treatment was reported to be significantly better and with a lower

Moxibustion and cupping acupuncture techniques have also been suggested as having efficacy for addressing urticaria.

relapse rate than the control (antihistamine).² In another clinical trial, after treatment with thick acupuncture needle subcutaneous penetration for 12 weeks, the symptom score in patients with chronic urticaria was significantly lower, compared to the medication (levocetirizine hydrochloride) group.³ Moxibustion⁴ and cupping⁵ acupuncture techniques have also been suggested as having efficacy for addressing urticaria.

Prebiotics—In a clinical study of healthy term infants with a parental history of atopy who received prebiotic oligosaccharide-supplemented formula (containing neutral short-chain galacto-oligosaccharides and long-chain fructo-oligosaccharides), cumulative incidence of allergic urticaria was found to be significantly higher in the study's placebo group compared to the treatment group.⁶ More research is needed.

Probiotics—A preliminary study was conducted to examine the effect of ENDOLAC (*Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus delbrueckii*, and *Streptococcus thermophilus*) on CD34+