



The Function of Spleen and Stomach in TCM

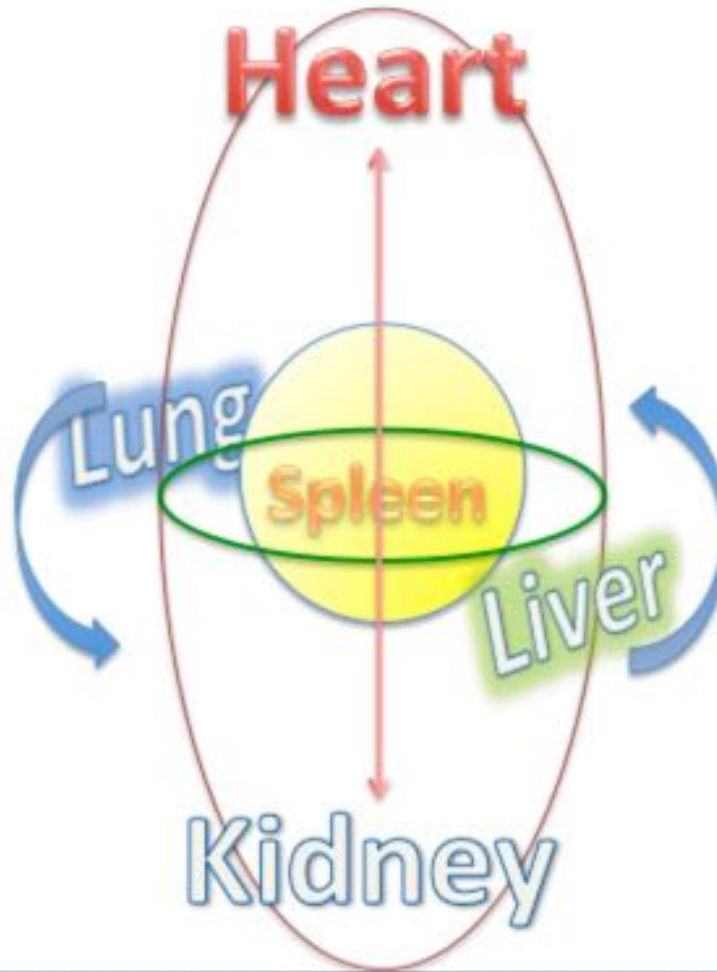
Allison Bailey, MD



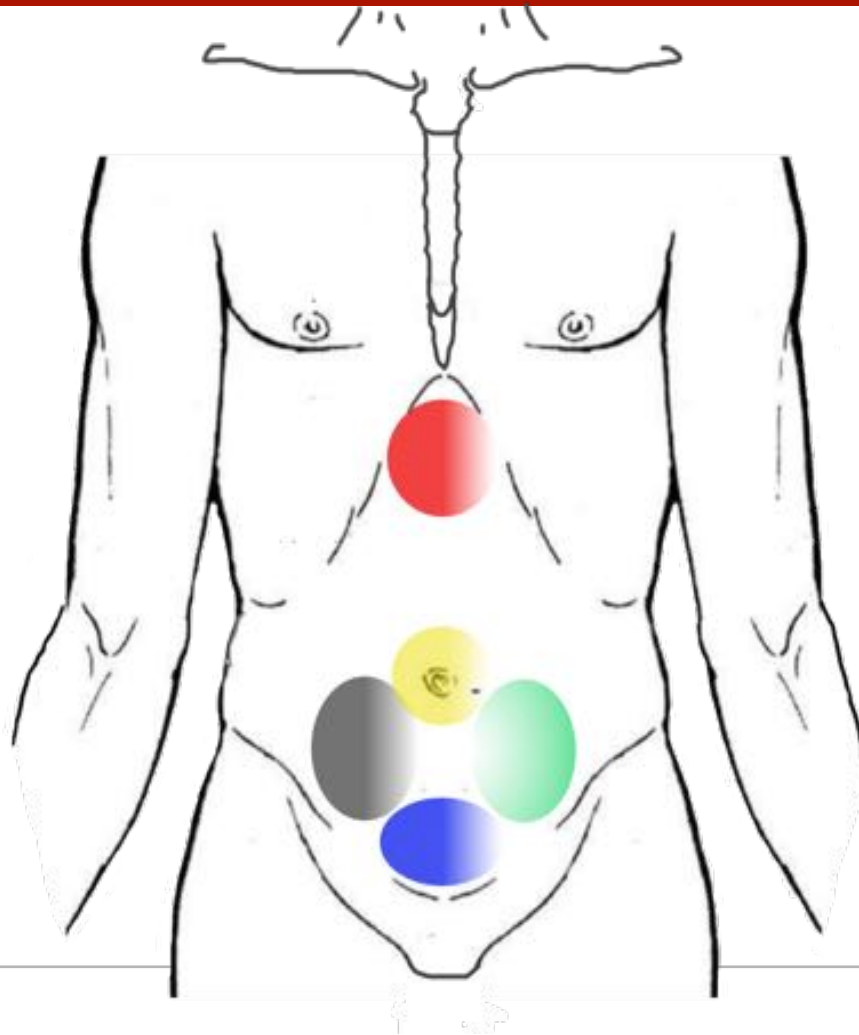
Li Dong Yuan (1180-1251)

- One of the four major schools of thought in Chinese medicine
- Placed the Stomach and Spleen at the center of physiology and pathology
- Maintained that injury to the Stomach and Spleen through **irregular diet** and **overwork** was the origin of numerous diseases
- Advocated tonification & regulation of Stomach and Spleen as main treatment principle

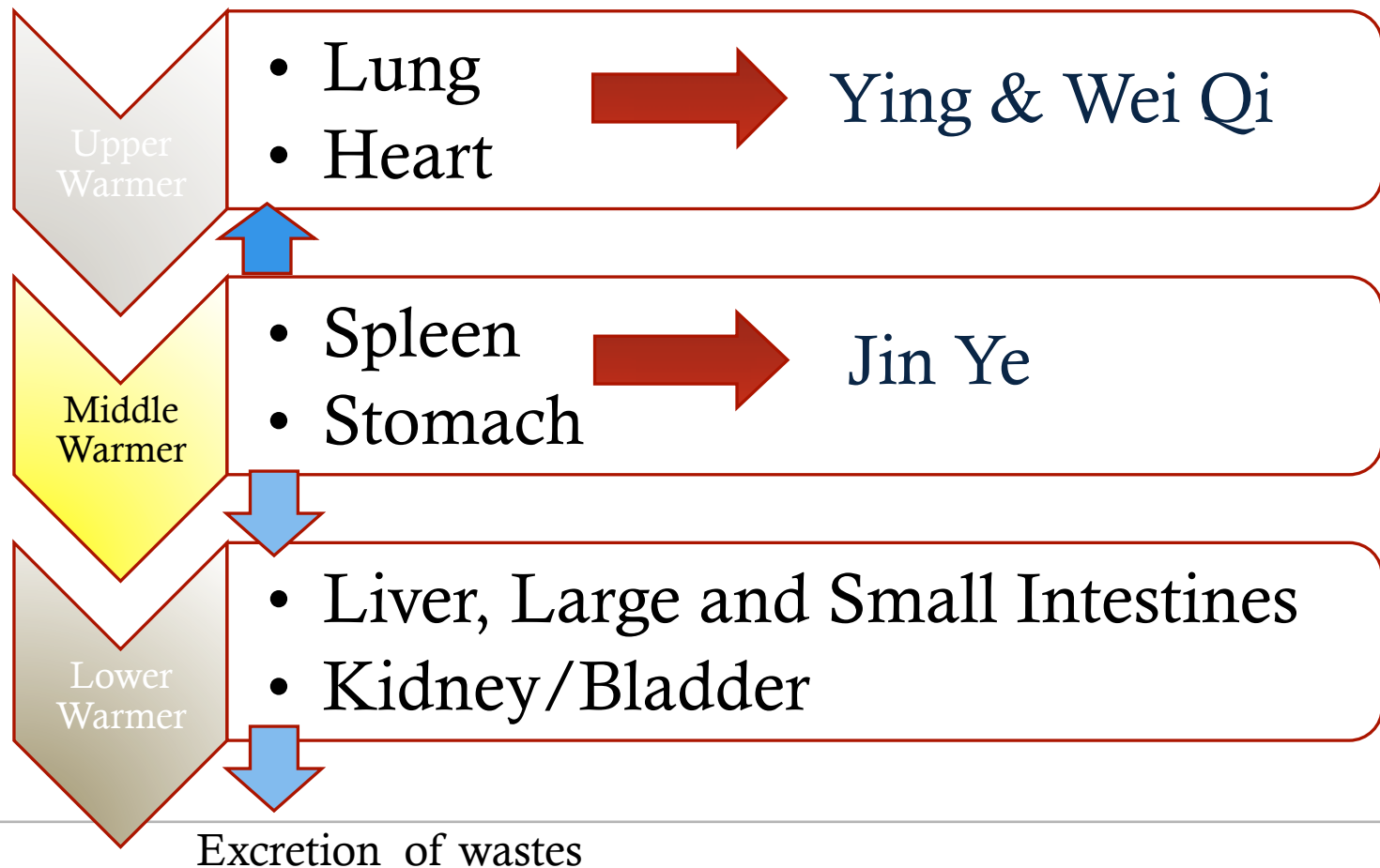
Center of the Body



5 Element Theory



Middle Burner



Spleen Stomach Relationship

- Closest of any of the Yin Yang Organ Pairs, two aspects of one organ system
- Stomach function of rotting and ripening is closely coordinated with the Spleen function of transforming and transporting essences of food.
- The Spleen function of transporting Food Qi to the whole body is closely dependent on Stomach Qi.
- The Stomach is the origin of fluids and must rely on the Spleen function of transforming and separating body fluids.



Stomach Spleen Relationship

STOMACH

- Stomach is Yang
- Stomach Qi descends
- Stomach likes wetness and dislikes dryness
- Stomach easily suffers from excess
- Stomach is prone to heat

SPLEEN

- Spleen is Yin
- Spleen Qi ascends
- Spleen likes dryness and dislikes wetness
- Spleen easily suffers from deficiency
- Spleen is prone to cold

Spleen

- Plays a central role in the digestive process
- Governs the transformation and transportation of food essences
- Absorbs nourishment from food, separates the usable from unusable part of food
- Extracts Food-Qi (Gu Qi), combines with air in the Lungs to form Gathering Qi (Zong Qi), which is the basis for True Qi

Functions of the Spleen

- Governs transformation and transportation
- Controls the ascending of Qi
- Controls Blood
- Controls the muscles & limbs
- Opens into the mouth
- Manifests in the lips
- Controls saliva
- Controls the holding of Qi in place
- Houses the intellect (Yi)
- Is affected by pensiveness or rumination

What about the pancreas?

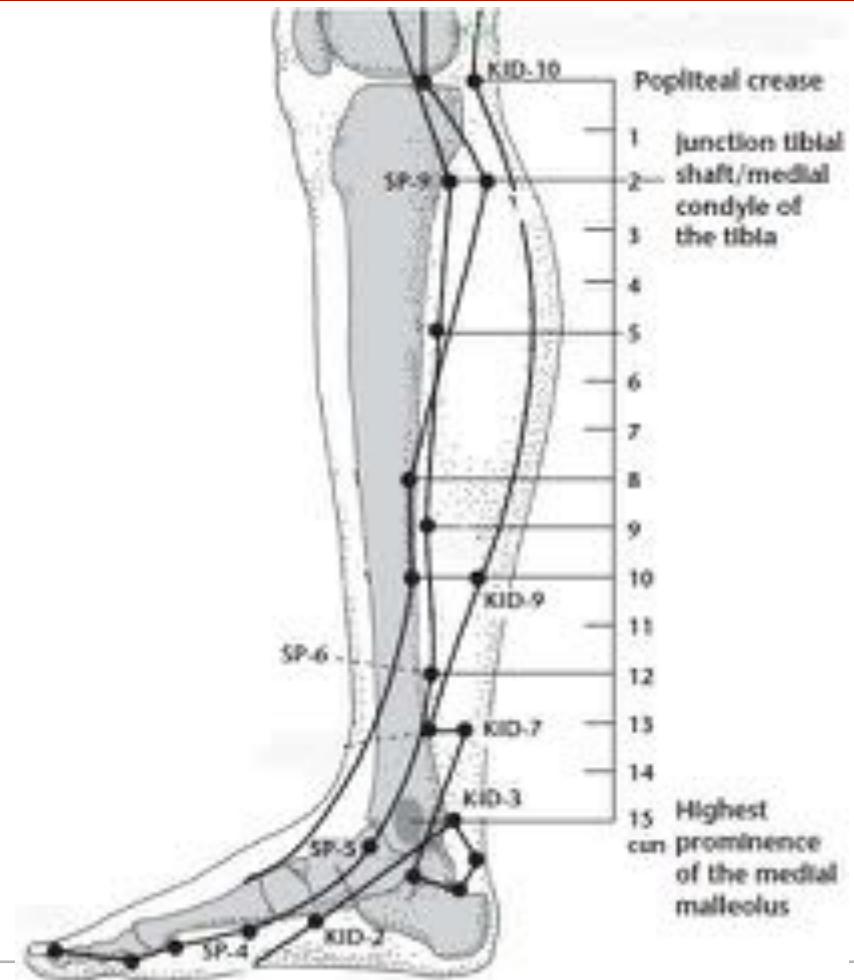
- There is no mention of the pancreas in Chinese medicine
- Some authors think functionally the pancreas is included in the notion of Spleen
 - SP = Spleen/Pancreas
- Many of Spleen's functions can be compared to the secretion of digestive enzymes of the pancreas

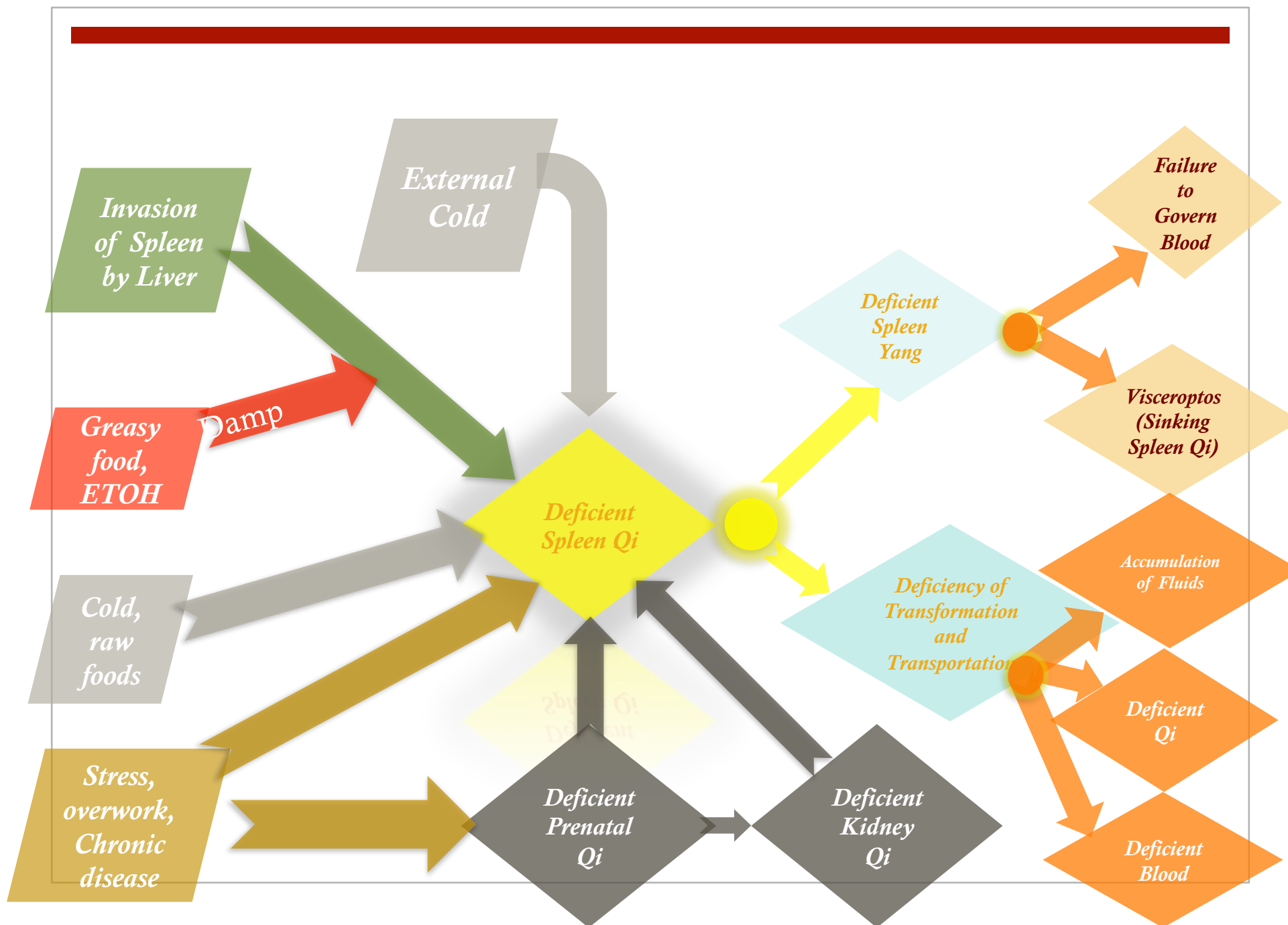
Transformation & Transportation of Food Essences & Qi

- Governs transformation and transportation of Food Essences and Qi
- Transforms ingested food and drink to extract Qi from it, creates Food-Qi (Gu Qi)
- Once Food-Qi is formed the Spleen transports this to various organs and parts of the body
- Directs the “refined essence” upwards to the lungs to form Gathering Qi (Zong Qi), and to the Heart to form Blood
- Crucial to the process of digestion

Spleen Deficiency

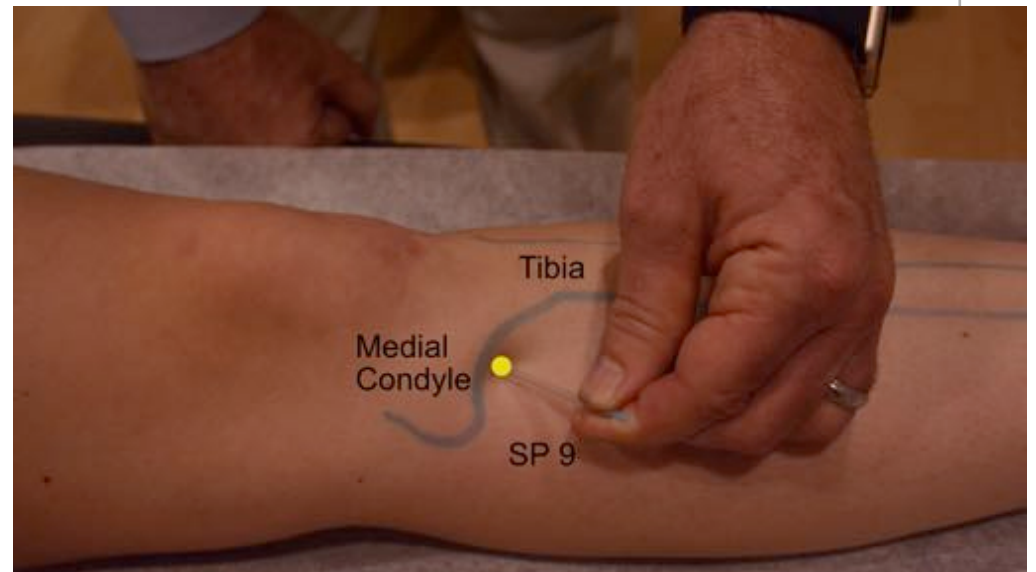
- One of the **most common** patterns encountered in clinical practice
- If Spleen's function is impaired there may be poor appetite, abdominal distention and loose stools, fatigue, muscle weakness
- TCM approach: **Sp 6** and **St 36** often used in combination to tonify Spleen Qi in the setting of digestive problems





Transformation and Transportation of Fluids

- Separates usable from unusable part of fluids sending the “clear” part up to the lungs and the “turbid” part down to the intestines
- If this function is impaired, fluids may accumulate and form Dampness or Phlegm or edema
- Spleen is also affected by external Dampness



Use **Sp 9** with **ST 40** to dispel dampness from the lower burner

Controls the ascending of Qi

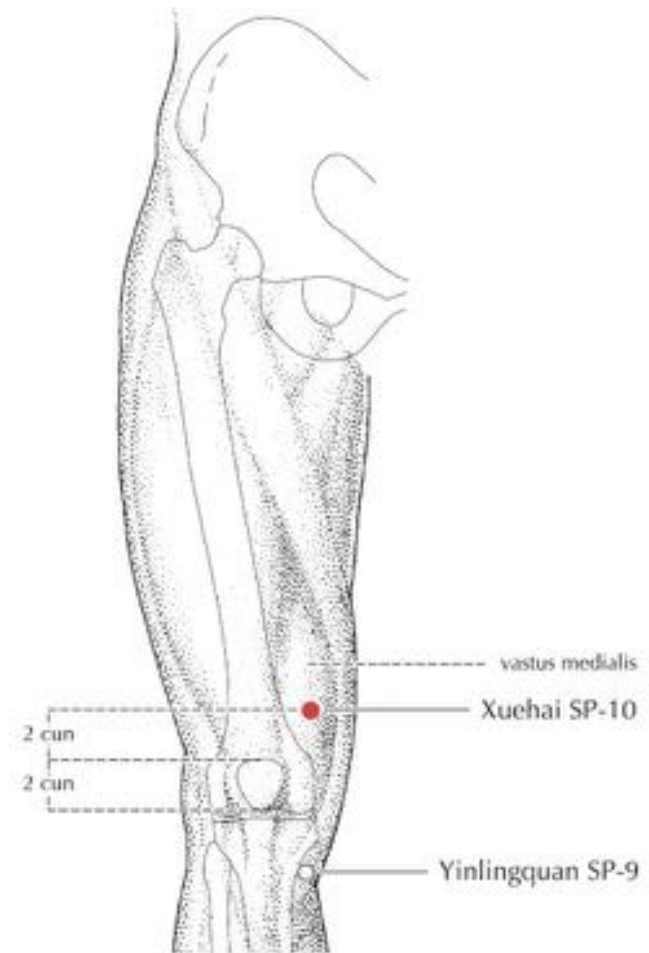
- Spleen and Stomach at the center of the Middle Burner
- Together control the direction and movement of Qi in all burners
- Spleen Qi ascends to the Lungs (upper burner) to form Gathering Qi (Zong Qi)
- Stomach Qi descends to the intestines (lower burner)
- Coordination of ascending Spleen-Qi & descending Stomach-Qi essential for production of Qi and Blood

Ascending Spleen Qi

- Also lifts the internal organs to keep them in their correct place
- If this function of Spleen fails, the organs (uterus, bladder, intestines) may prolapse
- Also keeps other substances in place
 - Blood in blood vessels - Easy bruising = Spleen deficiency
 - Histamine in Mast Cells – Hives or Allergies = Spleen deficiency
- TCM approach: to stimulate this function of the spleen in the case of prolapse use **BI 20**, **CV 12** and **CV 6**

Spleen Controls the Blood

- The spleen keeps the blood in its correct place; inside the blood vessels
- Healthy Spleen Qi=blood circulates normally and stays in the vessels
- Deficient Spleen-Qi=hemorrhage, particularly bleeding downwards (from uterus, bladder, intestines)
- TCM approach: **CV 12, St 36, Sp 10**



Spleen controls the muscles & limbs

- Extracts Food-Qi (Gu Qi) to nourish the body
- Refined Qi is sent to the muscles especially the limb muscles
- If Spleen-Qi is weak, there is weakness and fatigue, atrophy if extreme
- Determines the amount of physical energy a person has



Additional functions of Spleen

- Opens into the mouth: enables normal chewing and taste
- Manifests in the lips: reflects the state of the spleen, rosy and moist=healthy spleen
- Controls saliva: moistens the mouth and aids digestion, thin and clear
- Houses the intellect (YI): concentration, memory, excess study can adversely affect Spleen
- Affected by pensiveness: brooding on the past or rumination; excessive thinking of certain events/people

Other Spleen Relationships

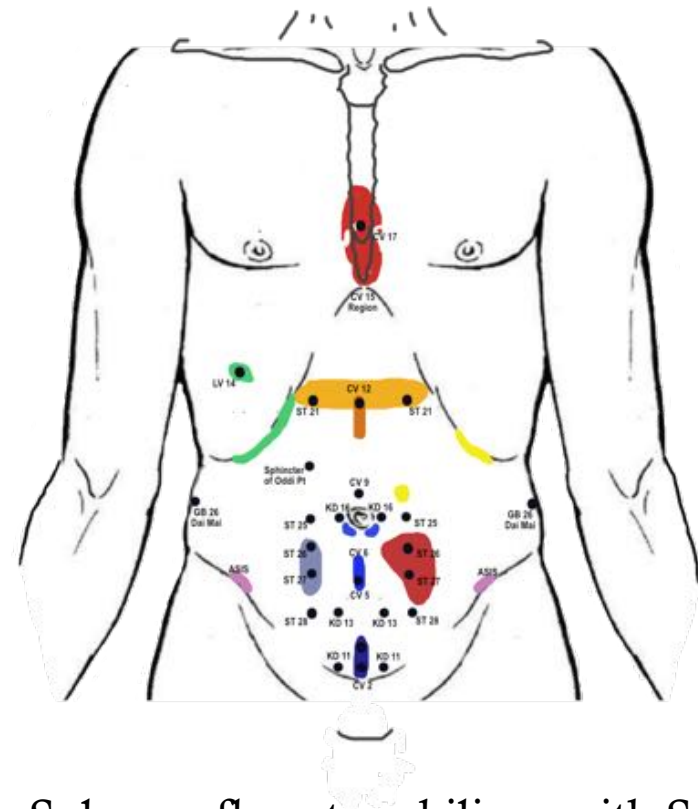
- Its smell is fragrant
- Its color is yellow
- Its taste is sweet
- Its climate is Dampness: “The spleen loathes Dampness”
- Its sound is singing

Spleen imbalance symptoms

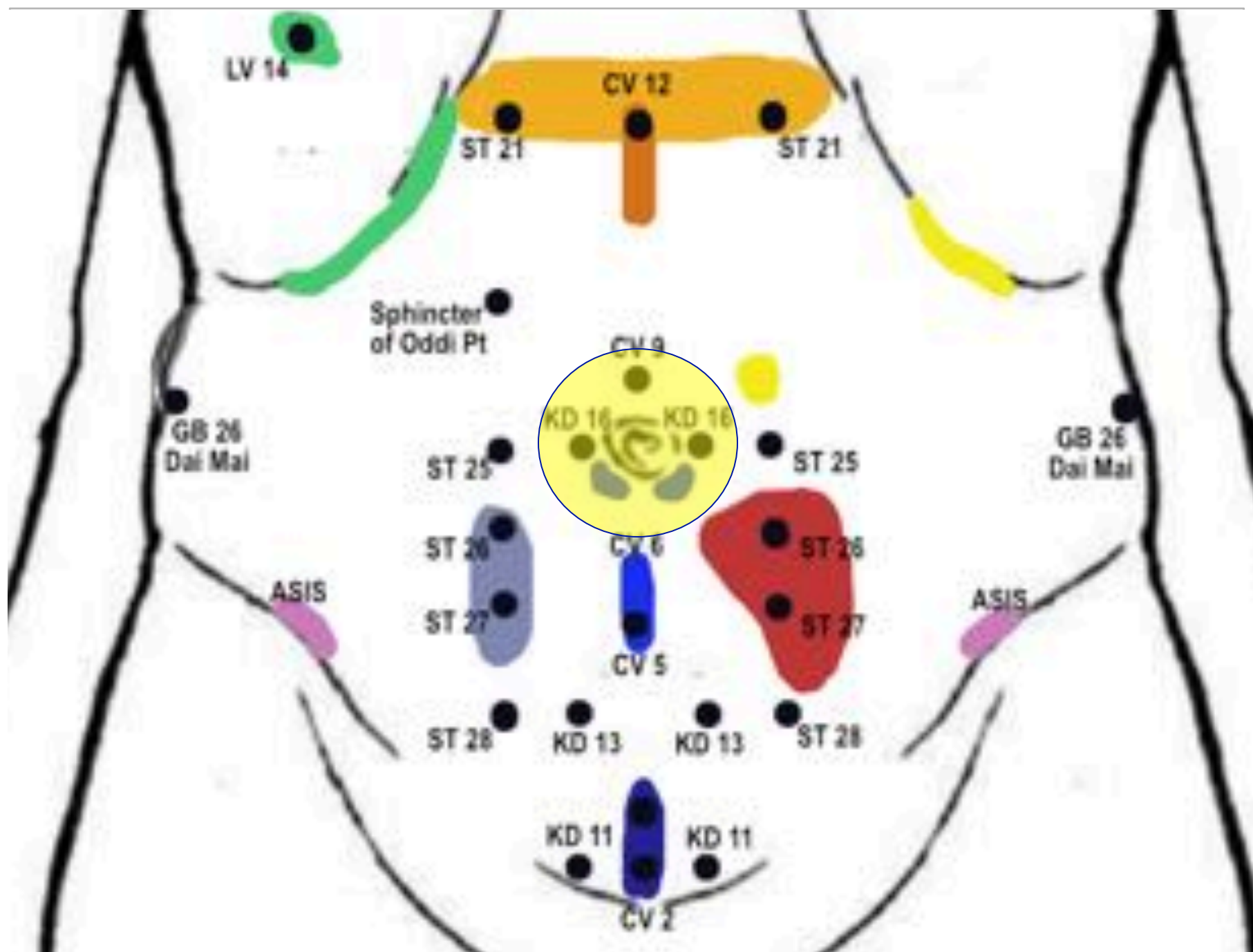
- Water retention: edema, accumulation of water in the stomach, general puffiness
- Sugar imbalance/sensitivity: diabetes, other sx
- Blood related problems: anemia, excessive bleeding, bleeding hemorrhoids, blood pressure problems, to stop bleeding use Sp 2
- Muscular pain/spasm: shoulder pain at GB 21, mid back spasms
- Structural imbalances: bunion pain, LBP at L4-5, sciatica to great toe, medial meniscus problems
- Digestive problems: gas, ulcers

Spleen Imbalance: abdominal diagnosis

- Spleen reflex at umbilicus: pressure pain around entire umbilicus
- May be colder than the rest of the abdomen
- Pressure pain at CV12 and/or area of St 21
- Compare left to right upper abdominal region
- Sugar caterpillar

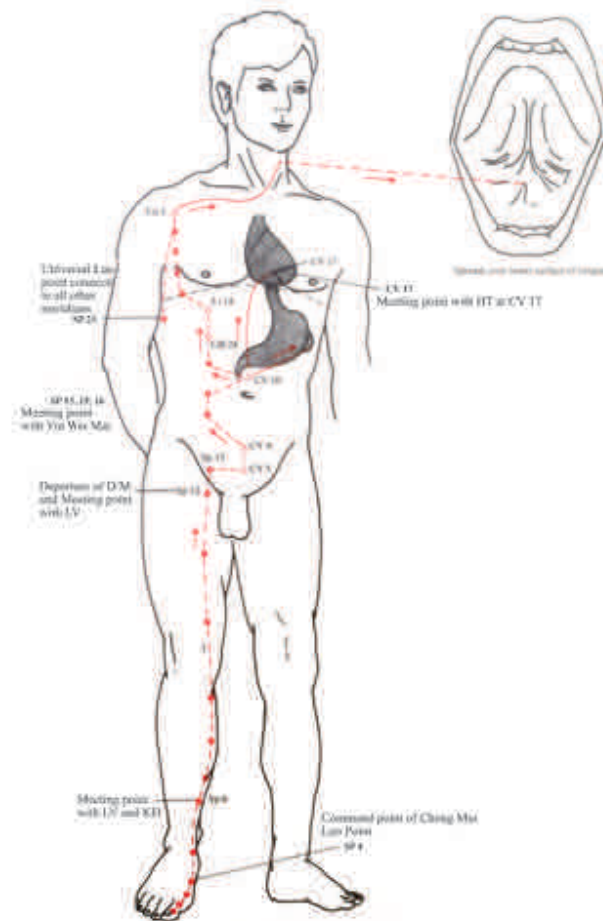


Release Spleen reflex at umbilicus with Sp 9



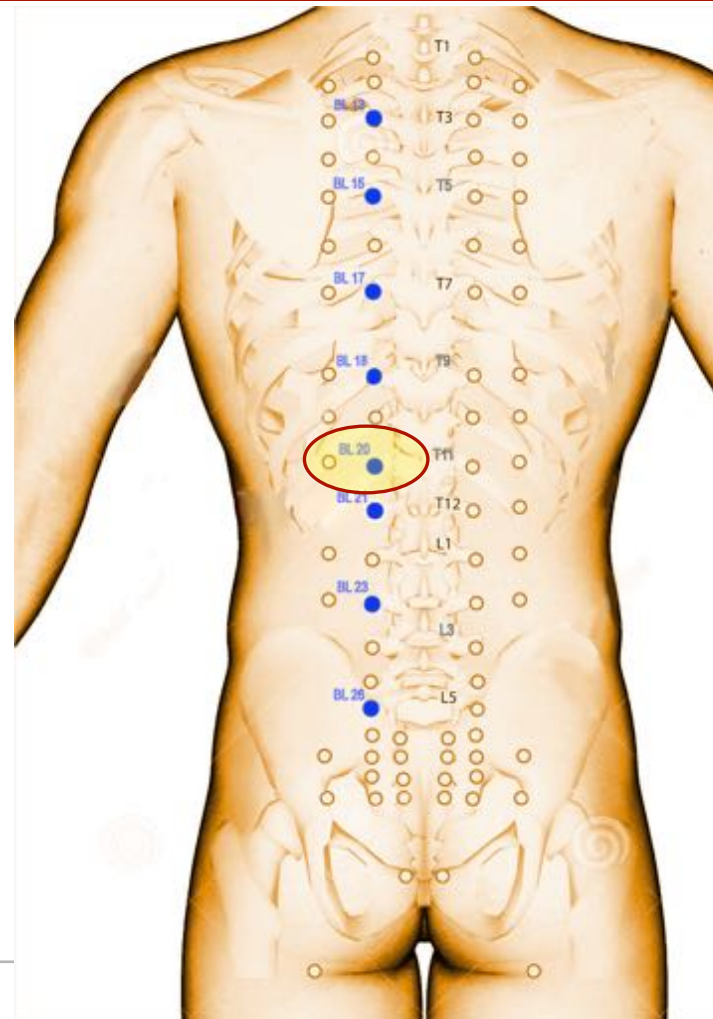
Spleen imbalance meridian diagnosis

- Spleen deficient patients may have complaints of pain along spleen meridian line (bunion, medial meniscus, inner thigh)
- Sliding finger along spleen meridian may feel bumpy or gummy regions
- Pressure pain on Spleen meridian in inner thigh



Spleen imbalance back diagnosis

- Compare left to right Huato Jiaji C3 region for tightness/pressure pain
- Pressure pain at L4-5 GV and/or Huato Jiaji area
- With sugar sensitivity there is commonly pressure pain at T10-11 and/or T11-12 region, patient may complain of mid back spasm



Spleen imbalance treatments

- **Water or food retention in the stomach:** Bilateral needling of St Qi line, Nagano's Sp 3 (Sp 3.2), Sp 9 and St 24
- Sp 3.2 needle at a 45 degree angle with the flow of the meridian
- Sp 9 needle at 10-15 degree angle with the flow of the meridian
- St 24 needle perpendicularly
 - Helps resolve phlegm

Spleen imbalance treatments

- **L4-5 pain:** Sp 9 needled at 10-15 degree angle with the flow of meridian
- May be gummy/gelosis in the region of Sp 9
- May need more than one needle at this location to reduce pain at L4-5 spinal segment
- Often treated during both ventral and dorsal part of the treatment
- May add sacroiliac treatment to release tension at L4-5

Spleen imbalance treatments

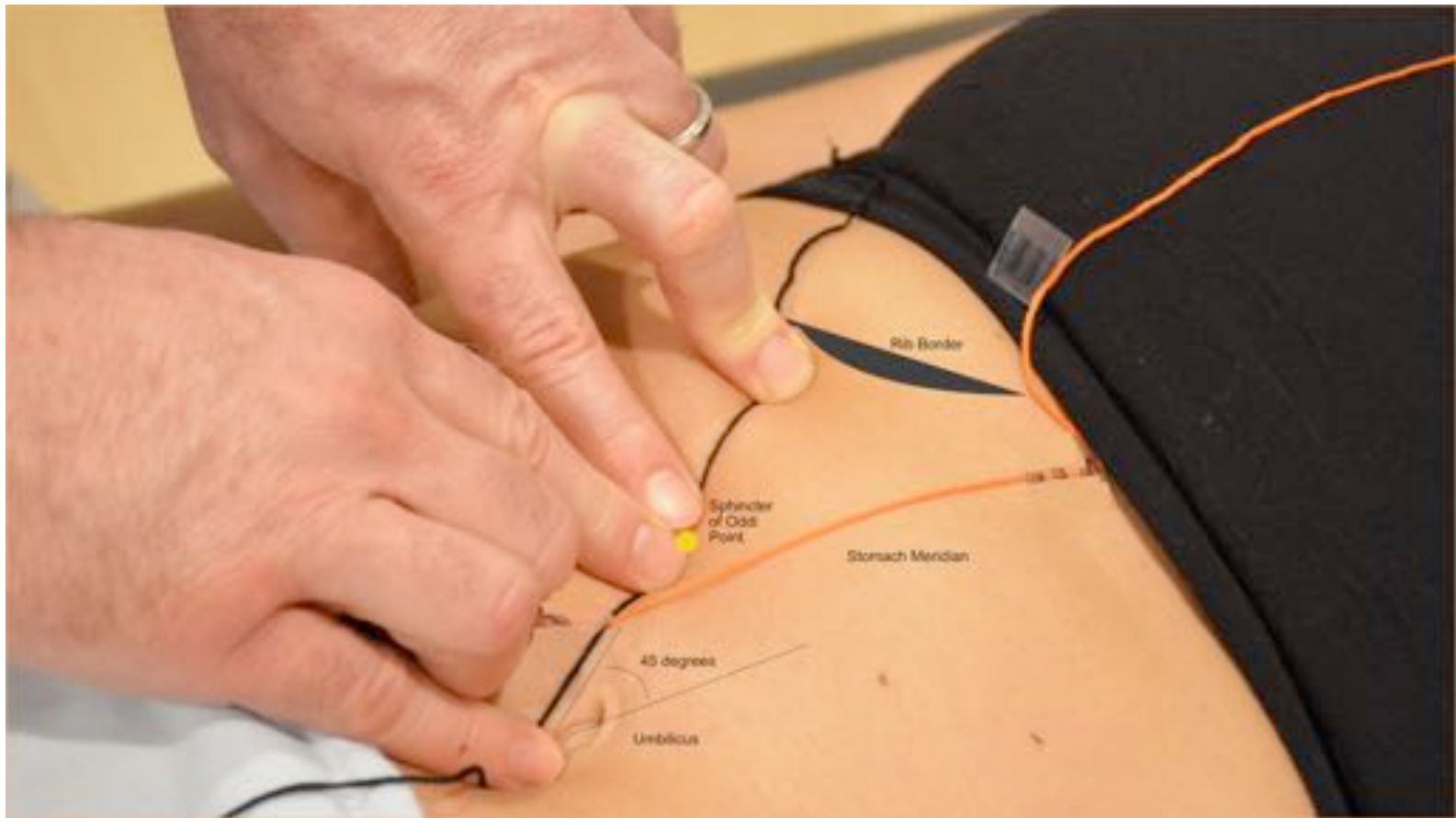
- **Sugar imbalance:**
- Diabetics and their complications
- Other symptoms due to sugar intake, such as fogginess, headache, fatigue/lethargy, including hypoglycemia or need to eat frequently to avoid hypoglycemic episodes
- Mid back spasm
- Allergies, sinusitis
- Joint pain/inflammation, calf spasm

Sugar imbalance treatments

- Tonify the Spleen with **Sp 3.2** and **Sp 9**
 - Add Back Shu (**BL 20**) or **Sugar Points** (Region of T10-T12 either on GV or Huato Jiaji line where tight or painful)
- If muscular pain, **Right St 22** (sphincter of Oddi point)
- Evaluate for Liver Excess, pressure pain on the liver or on right Liv 14
- Spleen deficiency, especially when chronic, is susceptible to invasion by Liver
- If present, treat Liver excess pattern then the sugar imbalance



Sphincter of Oddi Point: Right St 22 if muscular pain



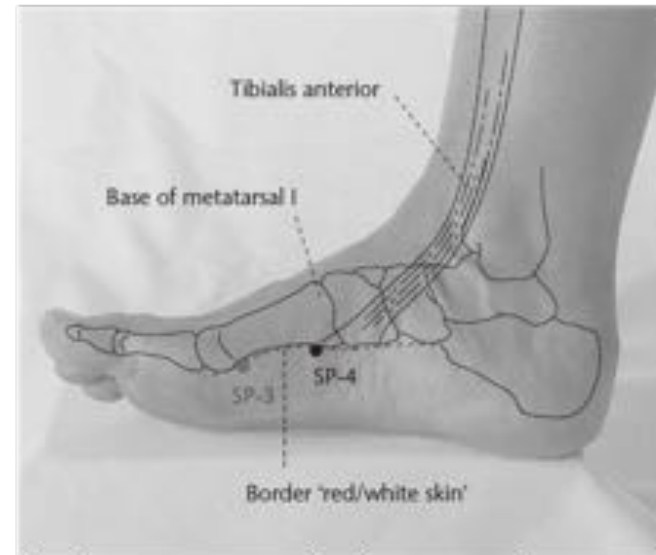
Sugar imbalance dorsal treatment

Treatment of Master Nagano's sugar point

- Palpate between the spinous processes and the Huato Jiaji points of T10, T11 and T12
- Tight often jumpy, tender region
- If treating the GV line, shallow insertion on 10-15 degree angle with flow of meridian
- If treating Huato Jiaji region, 45 degree angle towards the spine
- If muscle spasm/jumpiness at Bl 20-21 (Spleen Shu) area, use Sp 3.2 first, then needle left at 45 degree angle with flow of meridian

Additional Spleen imbalance treatments

- **Stomach/duodenal ulcers:**
Stomach ulcers present with pressure pain at the left St21 area and duodenal ulcers with pressure pain at the right St 21 area
- **Sp 4** is most important point, usually 45 degree angle with flow of meridian but variable so must palpate
- Often most effective point is contralateral
- Patients often highly stressed, emotional so check Shao Yang and Pericardium reflexes



Additional Spleen imbalance treatments

- **Bunion pain/Hallux Valgus:** Structural imbalance in the Spleen meridian, affects Sp 2 (fire point) and Sp 3 (source point)
- May lead to other structural imbalances due to altered stance and gait including disturbance in the Gallbladder meridian, knee problems and sacroiliac joint dysfunction
- Sp 4 is main treatment point, reduce pressure pain on the 1st MTP joint
- KD 7 may be helpful due to bone involvement
- If joint is inflamed, Sp 5 and Sp 9 (Metal Water points) are treated before Sp 4
- Supporting points: Liv 8, immune points (LI 10-11), Bl 11 (Bone Shu)

Additional Spleen imbalance treatments

- Medial meniscus pain: Most common treatment point is Sp 4, often contralateral but sometimes ipsilateral or bilateral
- PC 6 contralateral and Ht 7 ipsilateral
- Ht7 is the Earth point on the Fire channel and therefore tonifies the Spleen and Stomach

Stomach

- Together with Spleen known as “the Root of Post-Heaven Qi”
- “The Stomach is the Sea of water and grains and the great Source of nourishment for the 6 Yang organs.”

Functions of the Stomach

- The Stomach controls 'receiving'
- The Stomach controls the 'rotting and ripening' of food
- The Stomach controls the transportation of food essences
- The Stomach controls the descending of Qi
- The Stomach is the origin of fluids

The 'rotting and ripening' of food

- The stomach transforms ingested food and drink by the process of fermentation
- Prepares the ground for the Spleen to separate and extract the refined essence
- “The Middle Burner is in the Stomach...and controls the rotting and ripening of food and drink”

Stomach-Qi

- Stomach is the origin of Qi in the body
- Presence of Stomach-Qi predicts good prognosis and life, whereas its absence predicts poor prognosis, even death
- Stomach-Qi reflects the health and normal functioning of the Spleen as well as Stomach

Stomach-Qi

- Yu Jia Yan (1585-1664) “If Stomach-Qi is strong the 5 Yin organs are healthy, if Stomach-Qi is weak they will decline”
- Zhang Jie Bin “Stomach-Qi is the nourishment of life itself, if the Stomach is strong life will be healthy, if the Stomach is weak, life will be unhealthy”
- TCM approach: Use **St 36** and **Sp 6** to tonify Qi and Blood

Transportation of food essences

- The stomach along with the spleen is responsible for the transport of food essences to the whole body, especially the limbs
- Spleen and Stomach inseparable
- Deficiency of Stomach and Spleen very common in clinical practice
- Patient feels fatigued and the limbs weak
- TCM: Use **St 36** and **Sp 6**

The Stomach controls the descending of Qi

- Sends transformed food down to the Small Intestine
- When healthy, Stomach-Qi should have a downward movement
- If this function fails, food stays in the stomach causing fullness, abdominal distension, belching, hiccups, nausea and vomiting
- Liver assists in this function
- TCM approach: stimulate **CV10**

The Stomach is the origin of fluids

- In order to perform its job of the 'rotting and ripening' the Stomach requires sufficient fluids
- Part of food and drink that doesn't become food essences forms Body Fluids
- If there are insufficient Stomach fluids, a person will be thirsty, tongue dry and cracked, and digestion will be poor
- 'Likes wetness and dislikes dryness'

Other aspects of the Stomach

- Mental aspect: Stomach easily suffers from Excess patterns such as Fire, results in mental agitation (mania, hypomania, anxiety, hyperactivity)
- Dreams: If deficient may dream of a large meal
- TCM approach: treat the mental aspect of Stomach pathology with **St 40**.
 - Clears phlegm can influence mood
 - Luo point connecting Stomach to Spleen

Absence of coating, swelling=
Stomach-Qi deficiency

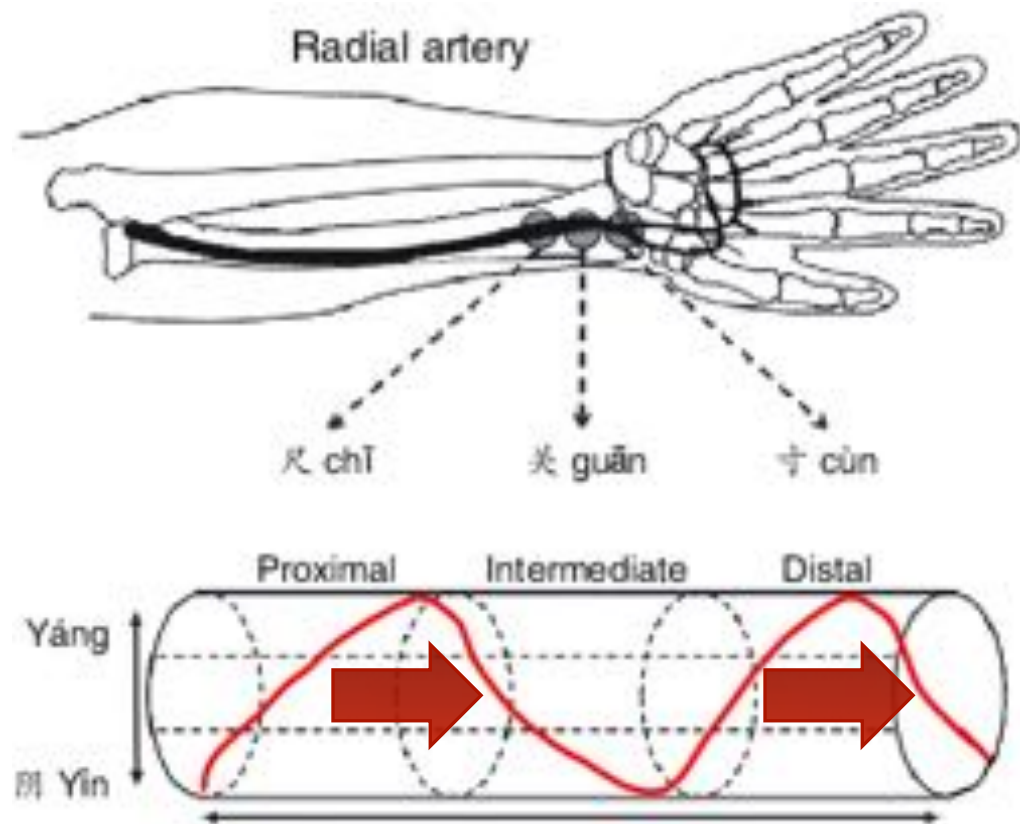


Stomach Qi Deficiency Diagnosis

- Primarily pulse diagnosis
- May also be pressure pain at CV 12
- By transporting food to all the organs the Stomach ensures that the Qi of the organs reaches the pulse
- When Stomach Qi is sufficient there is a normal movement of blood from the heart to the finger tips, radial pulse should feel like a wave under your finger tips

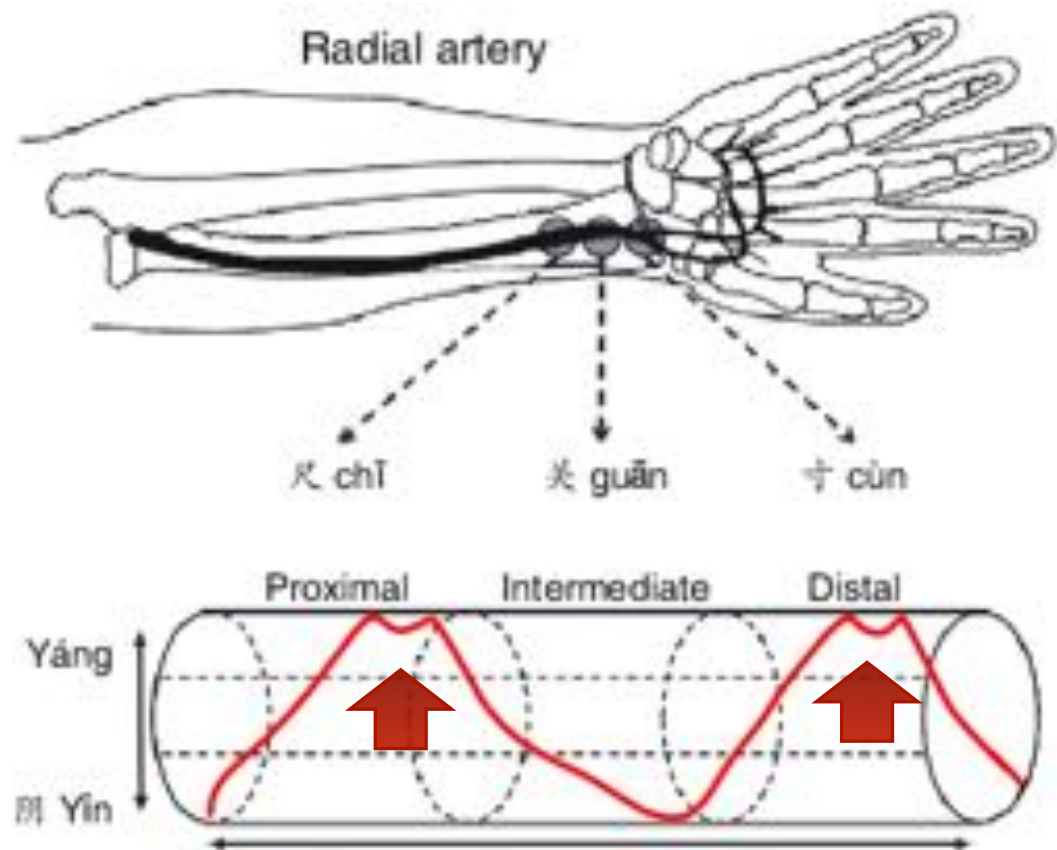
Good Stomach-Qi Pulse

- Neither weak nor strong
- Regular rather slow beat
- 'Soft and gentle'
- Wave-like characteristic



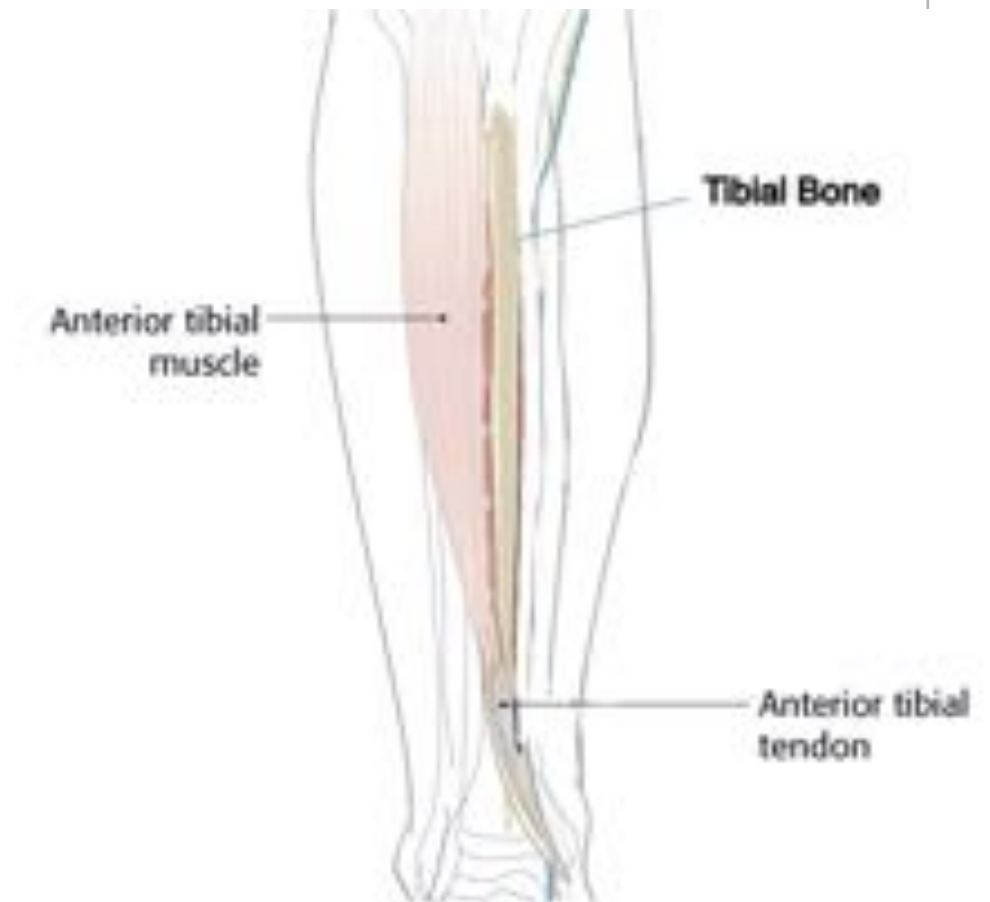
Stomach-Qi deficiency Pulse

- Pecking up against finger rather than rolling under finger, bird-like
- 'Rough and hard' under finger
- Loses its wave-like feeling
- Can also be weak pecking but weak, lacking the normal full feeling under fingers



Stomach-Qi deficiency treatment

- Treatment of the Stomach Qi line beginning on the left side of the body
- Slide finger down the lateral side of the left tibia between ST 36 and St 41 to find bumps



Stomach-Qi deficiency treatment

- Needled at a 10 degree angle into the bump with the flow of the meridian
- Right side is treated after the left
- Performed as part of the constitutional treatment



Viceroptosis

- Internal organs in the abdominopelvic cavity have dropped in position
- Common causes: pregnancy, abdominal weight gain, surgical inventions, weakened connective tissue
- Symptoms: low back pain, groin pain, tired legs, thigh and knee pain, sciatica, stiff shoulders, urinary frequency



Visceroptosis

- Diagnosis: pressure pain along inguinal ligament from ASIS to pubic bone especially at St 30 area, inner Yin also tender
- Treatment: primary treatment point is St 13
- Palpate St 13 upwards and laterally at 45 degree angle
- Supporting points: inner Yin, St 33, GB 31
- Dorsal points: GB25, Bl23, Bl25

Take Home “Points”

- Spleen deficiency is one of the most common problems we see in clinical practice with a wide array of clinical presentations
 - Digestive problems
 - Diabetes or hypoglycemia
 - Asthma, allergies
 - Back and neck pain, headaches
- Stomach Qi deficiency, when present, should be addressed as part of the basic constitutional treatments

Key Points

- Sp 3.2
- Sp 4
- Sp 5 with Sp 9 (metal water)
- Sp 6
- Sp 9
- Sphincter of Oddi Point
- CV 10 and CV 12
- St 36
- St Qi line
- Sugar points on back in Spleen Shu region