

## **RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)**

There are over 100 types of arthritis. Osteoarthritis is the most common and is caused by wear and tear on the joints and results in the gradual deterioration of the cartilage that lines the bone structures.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disorder that causes inflammation. Like osteoarthritis it affects the joints but can also cause inflammation in the tendons, lungs and blood vessels.

Conventional treatment of rheumatoid arthritis employs the use of drugs—pain killers, anti-inflammatories, and disease modifying anti-rheumatic medications (DMARD's).

### **TCM Definition and Treatment of Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)**

TCM classifies all arthritis as “bi” or “painful obstruction syndrome” and differentiation depends on the symptoms such as “wind bi”, “hot bi” etc. These distinctions are important in order to establish the root cause and administer the proper treatment.

For example, if the condition was due to “wind-cold-damp bone bi”, the protocol would be to clear phlegm, invigorate blood, strengthen kidneys, boost qi, and clear toxins. Since there are numerous combinations of conditions, each one requires an accurate diagnosis to establish the proper course of action.

Generally, treatment is divided into 3 phases and includes both acupuncture and herbs. Acupuncture treatments are given 2 – 3 times per week for several weeks. Then depending on the patient's progress 1 – 2 treatments are recommended for a few more weeks. In the third phase, treatments are reduced to once per week tapering off to once every 2 weeks, then once every 3 weeks and finally maintenance of once per month.

### **Case Study**

A 62 yr old woman was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and had been taking an anti-rheumatic drug for several years. Despite this, she remained in pain. Both hands were quite deformed, and since she was an accountant her right hand was more afflicted making it very difficult to do her job.

TCM diagnosed her as suffering from “bi zheng” due to “wind-cold-damp” so she was given an herbal formula to clear the stagnation of phlegm and blood, tonify her kidneys, strengthen qi, and clear heat toxins. Acupuncture treatments were given weekly and after 3 months she showed a marked improvement. Her treatment frequency was reduced and after a year the pain, redness and swelling had significantly abated.

### **Combining Conventional Medicine Treatments with TCM**

A study done in 2006 showed that more than 80% of British Columbians combined alternative therapies with their conventional treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. However, the majority did so without consulting their physicians, fearing disapproval. Unfortunately this lack of communication can be extremely hazardous due to complications arising from mixing drugs and herbs.

### **Summary**

Statistics have shown that acupuncture and herbal medicine are proven to be effective in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis.

Combining conventional western medicine with TCM is especially beneficial, but only with full disclosure and open dialogue with all physicians involved.