

# Health Action

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## Beneficial Bacteria—A Macro Look at Microbes

What have you done for your gut microbiome lately? Dr. Richard Calland makes a compelling argument for appreciating these many essential microorganisms, which are key players in the dynamics of health and disease.

8



## Get Feisty with Fermented Foods

One of the most inexpensive and powerful nutritional tools that you can use to improve your detoxification, digestion and immune processes is fermented foods. Learn to incorporate them into your diet with these vibrant recipes from nutritionist and culinary artist Eden Elizabeth.

30

## The Zero Waste Kitchen: Making Fruits and Veggies Last

North American households allow an estimated 30 to 40 percent of their food to go to waste. Turn your kitchen into a zero-waste cookery, courtesy of these tips from registered holistic nutritionist Christina Peressini.

28



## Can Homeopathy Prevent Disease during Epidemics or Pandemics?

You be the judge after reading this comprehensive review of homeopathic use during actual epidemics, along with comments and suggestions from classical homeopath Elena Cecchetto on what's needed to improve research and public understanding of this natural health discipline.

38

## Taking Antioxidants with Chemotherapy and Radiation



If your oncologist, pharmacist or other members of your oncology team advises you to stop taking antioxidants during chemotherapy and radiation, please show them this review article by naturopathic oncologist Dr. Walter Lemmo.

58

## Also in this issue

Good Soil, Good Gut, Good Health.....	12	Health Action Needed to Protect Oceans.....	48
Antibiotics Not Working for You? Try Ancient Alternatives.....	14	Canada Blocks NAFTA Investigation into B.C. Fish Farm Impacts on Wild Salmon.....	50
Gut Reaction: Consider Kefir.....	16	Update on Bill C-18 and a Call to Action for a New Seed Act for Farmers.....	52
HANS Member News.....	20	Herbicide Pollution and GMO Labelling.....	54
Healthy Marketplace.....	22	Health & Green Shorts.....	57
Confessions of a Baby Boomer.....	23	Put the Heat on Cancer.....	60
Simple Steps to Rejuvenate Your Liver.....	24	A Mother's Cancer Leads to a Daughter's Life Purpose.....	61
To Cleanse or Not to Cleanse?.....	26	Take Fewer Drugs, Not More.....	62
Free Yourself from Toxic Behaviours.....	35	Pioneer Profile: Dave Fuller.....	63
Osteopathy for Mothers, Babies and Children.....	36	Holy Basil—An Ayurvedic Tradition.....	64
Chinese Medicine Perspectives on Gynecological Disorders – Part I.....	42	Help for the Caregiver.....	65
Gentle Chiropractic Care for Prevention of Headaches and Migraines.....	44	Freedom in Hospital Care.....	66
How to Fight ... Lovingly.....	46		

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Director of Operations:  
Michael Volker

Executive Director:  
Lorna Hancock

Managing Editor:  
Michelle Hancock

Assistant Editor/Proofreader:  
Julie Cheng

Layout & Design:  
Annette Spreew

### Contributors:

Carolyne Abrams, Richard Calland, Elena Cecchetto, Sabrina Chen-See, Alexis Costello, Eden Elizabeth, Kim Louise Easterbrook, Brenda Eastwood, Ron Gale, Brenda Gill, Sharon Gurm, Jim Harding, Elizabeth Innes, Walter Lemmo, Luannah Livermore, Colin Medhurst, Trish Lim-O'Donnell, Deane Parkes, Ingrid Pincott, Denise Rochon, Ann Slater, Neelam Toprani, Shelley Ugyan, Alison Vandekerkhove, Thierry Vrain, Chun-Kai Wang, William Ware

Submissions: [editorial@hans.org](mailto:editorial@hans.org)

Letters to the editor and requests for article references may be sent to [editorial@hans.org](mailto:editorial@hans.org).

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Health Action Network Society  
214-5589 Byrne Rd., Burnaby, BC  
V5J 3J1

T: (604) 435-0512 F: (604) 435-1561  
[www.hans.org](http://www.hans.org) | [hans@hans.org](mailto:hans@hans.org)

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# Chinese Medicine Perspectives on Gynecological Disorders – Part 1

The link between menstrual pain, cysts and endometriosis

by Chun-Kai Wang,  
DTCM, R.Ac

**G**ynecology has ironically become a huge medical discipline because it is a constant source of trouble for both patients and practitioners. To a certain extent, every woman will experience gynecological complaints at one point or another in her menstrual lifetime over the course of roughly 50 years.

Today gynecology may be a wide discipline, but for the majority of females it centres around menstruation and its related disorders. Unfortunately to most females, many of these pathological phenomena are only loosely associated. For example, it is likely hard to correlate breast distention (swelling) with a cyst in the ovary, or find the link between hot flashes and waist soreness during one's period, or even try to relate a chronic shoulder and neck tightness with the monthly cycles. They don't seem to add up, but the fact of the matter is quite the opposite: they are all connected.

From the viewpoint of Chinese medicine, gynecology has a long history owing to the accumulated experiences of past doctors in trying to figure out the woman's body. Here I will talk about one of the more important points we can make about women's pathology, that the three common gynecologi-

cal disorders—menstrual pain, cysts (and fibroids) and endometriosis—are not only related, but are one and the same.

## **Functional stage: Menstrual pain and associated disorders**

Menstrual pain and its related issues are often regarded by most mainstream doctors as normal. Frequently complaints

are generally considered pathological only if they are extremely severe. And even then they may be completely neglected because nothing wrong is found in scans.

In Chinese medicine, however, the idea of pathology is not based on scans or reports since by that time things tend to be a bit late. The reason is that we firmly believe internal imbalances are what cause

menstrual disorders and these typically exist before any substantive lab finding comes out.

The things Chinese medicine pays attention to are instead menstrual cycle regularity, presence of pain and bloating, amount and quality of menstrual discharge, duration of period, and other accompanying symptoms such as chest distention, mood disorders, abnormal vaginal discharge and temperature fluctuations.

To Chinese medicine, the above aspects are key indicators of the quality and flow of energy and blood throughout the body, as well as markers for the existence of any pathological



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**Common gynecological disorders are not only related, but are one and the same.**

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redundancies. So while reports likely indicate nothing wrong, Chinese medicine usually finds the opposite in our diagnostic procedures. We usually call this the “functional” stage, which typically occurs when a woman is still quite young, between her 20s and early 30s. As a result, such issues largely end up being neglected.

## Cysts and fibroids

Generally at the functional stage, Chinese medicine understands the pathology as merely confined to the intangible energetic or “qi” level. As a stage usually characterized by nothing particularly definitive in terms of reports and scans, patient’s complaints may be perceived as “all in your head” (or psychosomatic). Because of this, western doctors may be limited in what they can do. Patients might go home thinking there’s nothing wrong, despite having to endure a few days of discomfort every month, or feel even more confused because of a lack of clear diagnosis.

Over the next few years, however, the issue will likely continue at their previous levels or gradually worsen. By the time she’s between 35 and 40, the previous energetic blockages no longer remain intangible, but instead assume some shape and form. This arises partly because the blockages accumulate over time and also because she has entered a state of aging decline, causing her internal systems to cope less efficiently as in her youth.

In scans and reports, this usually comes up as various-sized cysts, fibroids, and hormonal and endocrine deficiencies or excesses. Women should not

be surprised by these findings, given that the root of these issues has existed for many years prior. To Chinese medicine, of course, even at the initial functional stage, all the clinical signs are present already even if lab findings remain inconclusive.

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## Internal imbalances are what cause menstrual disorders.

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### Endometriosis

Many reasons underlie why women are not alert even when diagnosed with cysts and fibroids. The majority of females, however, do become worried by the time they’ve been diagnosed with endometriosis, a condition that is now medically believed to influence pregnancy.

For Chinese medicine though, endometriosis is simply a more severe version of regular cysts and fibroids. A cyst is a fluid-filled sack with a fibroid being a nodular mass; endometriosis resembles a mix

of the above except there may be the component of bleeding, clotting, bigger size, and more pronounced blood flow impairment involving bruise-like colouration. To us, these are exacerbated extremes of energetic blockages that end up severely hampering the flow of blood as well.

What further defines endometriosis is its location. The name is actually a general term referring to the abnormal growth of inner uterine tissue (endometrium) outside the uterus, and could be found anywhere in the lower abdominal cavity and its organs. Currently different schools of the mainstream medical community differ in their positions when explaining why uterine tissue decides to one day grow somewhere else. To me that’s not important; what’s more crucial is the clinical sequence of events.

Specifically, an initial functional imbalance where no physical abnormalities are yet present progresses first to more defined blockages such as cysts and fibroids, confined to the reproductive organs, to a final stage where these growths become more severe and greater

in number, spreading to neighbouring systems. From the lens of Chinese medicine, it is the same problem from beginning to end, differing only in scope.

From functional pain to endometriosis, modern medicine has no methods other than drug therapy and surgical intervention. Both methods in most cases fail to deal with the root of the issue, and from my experience, the problem comes back eventually. This becomes more obvious the more chronic the condition and the older the patient in her reproductive years.

Patients should not be scared, however. Chinese medicine with its thousands of years of experience regards the above situations as commonplace clinical phenomena. Likewise Chinese medicine has its own methods of treatment, something we will discuss in the next installment. 🌿

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Chun-Kai Wang, DTCM, R.Ac, is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine and registered acupuncturist who practises internal medicine. Dr. Chun-Kai Wang also lectures at PCU College of Holistic Medicine. [www.drwang.ca](http://www.drwang.ca) | 604-836-3968

## Perimenopausal Hot Flush Study

**T**he Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research is now recruiting Canadian women for this Canadian Institute of Health-funded randomized controlled trial to test whether oral micronized progesterone is more effective than placebo for hot flushes and night sweats in perimenopausal women.

The study is open to perimenopausal women ages 35 to 58 (who have menstruated within the past 12 months) with moderate-to-severe hot flushes (four per day) and/or night sweats (waking twice weekly). Participants should not have used estrogen, progesterone, progestin or hormonal birth control within the past six months.

For more details contact the study coordinator Andrea Cameron at (604) 875-5960. Toll free: 1 (855) 875-5960. Email: [andrea.cameron@ubc.ca](mailto:andrea.cameron@ubc.ca).