

# TCM: head ways

Hair grows from follicles beneath the skin, which also secrete sebum to lubricate the skin and hair. Healthy hair starts with a healthy scalp, so we should take care when choosing hair-care products such as dyes and perming chemicals, and also pay attention to internal influences such as stress, hormonal changes, nutritional deficiencies and medications.

In TCM the head is the meeting place of the meridians, which provide a rich supply of substances to the scalp and hair. The internal system has a major influence on the health of hair and the scalp, so internal treatment is as important as external applications.

A tense feeling in the scalp accompanied by heaviness of the head and fatigue can be due to cold and dampness obstructing the meridians, causing a sluggish flow of body fluids and chi (energy) in the region. Physicians will use ephedra and cassia twig to promote sweating to expel the cold and dampness. In addition, angelica root, Sichuan lovage and chrysanthemum are used to enhance blood and chi circulation and facilitate normal functioning in the head.

If an itchy scalp is the problem, wind pathogens may be the cause. Along with promoting sweating, schizonepeta herb, ledebouriella root and atractylodes rhizome are selected to soothe the scalp and stop itchiness.

Physicians divide dandruff into dry and oily types. White flakes with an itchy, dry scalp indicate that the scalp is undernourished – herbs such as angelica root, white peony root and fleecflower root can improve the nourishing effects of the blood.

Oily flakes accompanied by rashes or bumps on the scalp are due to damp-heat irritation – herbs such as oriental water-plantain rhizome, seven-lobed yam rhizome and corktree bark are prescribed to help clear the condition.

Herbal washes promote a balanced scalp. Solutions made with garden balsam stem, arborvitae leafy-twig and Chinese honeylocust fruit are often used for oily scalps, while solutions made with white mulberry root-bark, gallnet of Chinese sumac and Siberian cocklibur fruit can be used for a dry scalp.

TCM finds individuals with scalp problems tend to have other conditions such as constipation, skin dryness, allergies or insomnia. As a result, each remedy should be designed to exert both general and local therapeutic effects according to specific health needs. Quick results are not always seen as it may take weeks to overcome the problem.

TCM believes the kidney system transforms its stored essence into blood while the liver system stores the blood. If essence and blood are abundant, the hair will look lustrous and healthy.

Foods promoting the two systems – such as walnuts, black sesame, black soybeans, red dates, kelp, mulberry fruit and wolfberries – benefit the scalp and hair.

Diets that are too salty, spicy or sugary stimulate the secretion of hair follicles, so those with oily scalps should avoid such foods. Eat more fresh vegetables and fruit, mung beans, hawthorn fruit and coix seed to suppress oily secretions.

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