

# On the Treatment of Premature Ejaculation from the Perspective of “Gallbladder Stagnation and Phlegm Disturbance”

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**Abstract:** Premature ejaculation (PE) is a common male sexual dysfunction, and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has a long history and unique advantages in its treatment. In recent years, numerous studies have explored the pathogenesis and treatment of PE, mostly focusing on the “heart, liver, spleen, and kidney.” The author believes that the role of “gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance” in the occurrence and development of PE should not be overlooked. Therefore, this paper combines clinical cases to discuss the pathogenic mechanism and treatment of PE from the perspective of “gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance.”

**Keywords:** Premature ejaculation, Gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance, Gallbladder-kidney co-disease.

## 1. Introduction

Premature ejaculation (PE) [1] refers to a condition in which ejaculation occurs either before or shortly after vaginal penetration, followed by loss of erection, making it impossible to sustain normal sexual activity. It is one of the most common male sexual dysfunctions. Epidemiological studies report a PE prevalence rate of 20%-30%. However, due to the subjective nature of self-assessment in diagnosis, societal taboos surrounding sexuality, and increasing modern-day stress and poor lifestyle habits, the actual prevalence may be higher. Therefore, studying the pathogenesis and treatment of PE from the perspective of “gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance” holds significant importance.

## 2. Pathological Mechanisms

### 2.1 Gallbladder Stagnation and Qi Dysregulation

The gallbladder governs the pivot mechanism, and the Shaoyang gallbladder's pivotal function is a key link in the movement of qi throughout the body [2]. The “Suwen·Yinyang Lilun” states: “The separation and union of the three yin and three yang are such that Taiyang is the opening, Yangming is the closing, and Shaoyang is the pivot.” The “Lingshu·Genjie” further explains: “The spreading of yang qi is called opening, the receiving of yang qi is called closing, and the transportation of yang qi is called the pivot.” Here, “pivot” refers to a crucial hub, illustrating the importance of Shaoyang in regulating the distribution and movement of qi between Taiyang and Yangming.

The gallbladder, associated with the spring season, governs the ascending and dispersing qi of the body, serving as the starting point for overall qi movement. It connects the exterior and interior, links the upper and lower body, and facilitates communication between Taiyang and Yangming. When gallbladder qi flows smoothly, the body's yang qi circulates properly, and visceral qi functions normally. However, if the

Shaoyang gallbladder channel's pivot mechanism is impaired, leading to stagnation, prolonged qi stagnation may transform into fire. Gallbladder fire may ascend along the channel to disturb the heart spirit, causing restlessness and resulting in premature ejaculation due to impaired seminal gate control.

Additionally, dysfunction of the Shaoyang pivot mechanism can lead to emotional disturbances, impairing liver qi dispersion and causing qi stagnation and blood stasis. This disrupts the nourishment of the genital vessels, leading to seminal gate dysfunction and PE [3].

### 2.2 Gallbladder Stagnation and Spleen Deficiency Leading to Phlegm Turbidity

The occurrence of PE is closely related to internal phlegm retention. Gallbladder stagnation overacting on the spleen and spleen qi deficiency are key factors in phlegm production. Li Yongcui's “Zhengzhi Huibu·Tan Zheng” states: “Spleen deficiency fails to transport clear and turbid substances, leading to fluid retention and phlegm formation”, further noting that “the spleen is the source of phlegm.” This indicates that spleen qi deficiency and impaired qi movement are fundamental causes of phlegm turbidity [4].

Chen Shiduo's “Bianzheng Lu” records: “Some individuals have thin or cold semen... or ejaculate immediately upon penetration. While many attribute this to declining life-gate fire, it is actually due to insufficient spleen-stomach yang qi.” When spleen-stomach yang qi is deficient, transportation and transformation functions are impaired, leading to fluid retention and phlegm formation.

Phlegm turbidity arises not only from impaired spleen qi movement but also from liver-gallbladder stagnation. The “Suwen·Wuzang Shengchenglun” states: “The spleen governs the muscles, manifests in the lips, and is controlled by the liver.” The liver and gallbladder jointly regulate qi movement. When liver-gallbladder qi stagnates, excessive wood overacts on earth (spleen), impairing spleen function and leading to phlegm formation.

Modern lifestyles, characterized by excessive consumption of rich, greasy, spicy foods, further damage spleen-stomach function, contributing to phlegm-dampness accumulation. Thus, phlegm turbidity is not only a key pathological factor in PE but also the reason for its chronic and recurrent nature.

### 2.3 Gallbladder-Kidney Co-Disease and Ministerial Fire Dysfunction

The body's fire can be categorized into sovereign fire (heart yang) and ministerial fire. Ministerial fire, stored in the liver and gallbladder, assists sovereign fire in promoting visceral functions. It plays a crucial role in reproduction by warming and promoting the production, storage, and excretion of reproductive essence.

The gallbladder and kidneys jointly govern ministerial fire, which serves as the life force. As stated in "Yixue Qiu Shi": "From infancy to adulthood, the growth mechanism relies entirely on Shaoyang ministerial fire." The gallbladder, as the pivot, regulates ministerial fire to warm the entire body. The gallbladder and kidneys are interdependent: gallbladder qi relies on kidney storage for decisiveness, while kidney storage depends on gallbladder essence for proper function [5].

When gallbladder-kidney co-disease occurs, ministerial fire fails to warm the kidneys, leading to kidney yang deficiency and impaired essence storage. This results in seminal leakage, manifesting as spermatorrhea, nocturnal emissions, or PE.

### 2.4 Gallbladder Cold and Fright Leading to Seminal Gate Instability

Ancient texts state: "Evil in the gallbladder rebels in the stomach", indicating the close relationship between gallbladder pathology and the stomach. "Pujifang" Volume 34" notes: "The foot-Shaoyang gallbladder channel governs gallbladder deficiency-cold. When the gallbladder is deficient, cold arises, leading to fear and an inability to sleep alone."

Gallbladder cold often arises from chronic spleen-stomach deficiency due to poor diet or illness. Spleen-stomach deficiency leads to gallbladder qi deficiency, progressing to yang deficiency and cold. This results in insufficient warmth and propulsion for normal ejaculation, causing seminal gate instability and refractory PE [6].

Patients with gallbladder cold often exhibit symptoms such as rapid ejaculation, cold intolerance, dry mouth, bitter taste, insomnia, frequent urination, and loose stools. Scholars suggest that "Wendan Tang" (Warm the Gallbladder Decoction) was originally designed for gallbladder cold syndrome [8]. Adding cinnamon and dried ginger enhances its warming effects, showing good clinical efficacy.

### 3. "Zhuangdan Yanshi Tang": Treating PE from Gallbladder Stagnation and Phlegm Disturbance

PE has a complex pathogenesis and tends to recur. Treatment

should differentiate deficiency/excess, identify affected organs, and assess heat/cold patterns. Acute cases in young, robust individuals often involve excess patterns, requiring clearing and draining methods. Chronic cases in weak or elderly patients often involve deficiency patterns, requiring tonification and essence stabilization.

For PE due to "gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance", treatment should focus on regulating qi, resolving phlegm, and strengthening the gallbladder. "Wendan Tang", first recorded in "Jiyan Fang", has been modified over centuries and is now widely used for male sexual dysfunction, improving erection and increasing serum serotonin levels [9-11].

Based on clinical experience, the author modified "Wendan Tang" by adding "Zexie (Alisma)", "Fuling (Poria)", "Baizhu (Atractylodes)", "Guizhi (Cinnamon Twig)", "Wumei (Mume Fructus)", and "Jineijin (Gallus Gallus Endothelium)" to create "Zhuangdan Yanshi Tang" (Strengthen the Gallbladder and Delay Ejaculation Decoction). Its composition includes: "Banxia (Pinellia) 6g", "Zhiqiao (Citrus Aurantium) 6g", "Chenpi (Tangerine Peel) 9g", "Zhigancao (Honey-fried Licorice) 6g", "Guizhi (Cinnamon Twig) 9g", "Baizhu (Atractylodes) 9g", "Fuling (Poria) 9g", "Zexie (Alisma) 15g", "Wumei (Mume Fructus) 6g", "Jineijin (Gallus Gallus Endothelium) 10g", "Zhuru (Bamboo Shavings) 6g", "Shengjiang (Fresh Ginger) 12g.

Clinical studies [12] confirm that "Zhuangdan Yanshi Tang" effectively treats PE caused by gallbladder dysfunction, with significant improvement after 1-2 treatment courses.

### 4. Case Study

Patient: Male, 38 years old, initial visit on January 12, 2025. "Chief Complaint:" Premature ejaculation for over 10 years (ejaculation within ~1 minute).

"Accompanying Symptoms:" Low libido, irregular sexual activity, marital tension, depression, preference for rich foods and alcohol. "Signs:" Fatigue, depression, lower back soreness, leg weakness, scrotal dampness, hot palms/soles, insomnia, frequent waking, poor appetite, dry/bitter mouth, sticky stools, frequent yellow urination. "Tongue/Pulse:" Red tongue with yellow greasy coating; deep, slippery pulse. Diagnosis: "Western": Premature ejaculation. "TCM": PE due to gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance. "Treatment": Regulate qi, resolve phlegm, strengthen gallbladder. "Prescription": Modified "Zhuangdan Yanshi Tang" (as above) for 14 days. "Second Visit (Jan 28, 2025):" Improved to 2 minutes, but lingering symptoms. Added "Longdan Cao (Gentiana) 12g", "Ziheche (Placenta) 14g", and "Lurong Fen (Deer Antler Powder) 14g" for 14 days. "Third Visit (Feb 13, 2025):" Further improvement (3-5 minutes), reduced symptoms. Adjusted formula by removing "Longdan Cao", "Huangqin (Scutellaria)", and "Shengjiang", adding "Zhishi (Aurantium Immaturus) 6g", "Dingxiang (Clove) 6g", and "Dazao (Jujube) 15g" for 14 days. "Outcome:" Ejaculation time extended to 7 minutes, symptoms resolved, libido improved. Follow-up confirmed sustained results (5-7 minutes).

## 5. Discussion

The “Suwen · Pingre Binglun” states: “Where pathogenic factors accumulate, the qi must be deficient.” PE development is closely tied to gallbladder stagnation and phlegm disturbance. This case highlights the effectiveness of resolving gallbladder stagnation and phlegm to treat PE. The “Neijing” emphasizes that “all eleven organs depend on the gallbladder”, suggesting that gallbladder regulation can address systemic imbalances. Clinicians should consider gallbladder pathology in PE treatment to enhance therapeutic outcomes.

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