

Traditional Chinese Medicine Approaches for Recurrent Miscarriage

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Abstract: *Recurrent miscarriage is one of the common conditions affecting women of childbearing age. Its etiology and pathogenesis are complex. Based on the four diagnostic methods of observation, auscultation, inquiry, and palpation, it can be diagnosed as syndromes such as spleen-kidney deficiency, blood stasis, and emotional imbalance. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) offers unique advantages and effective treatments for recurrent miscarriage. Beyond traditional oral medications, numerous scholars and experts have demonstrated significant clinical efficacy in improving pregnancy outcomes through external TCM therapies. These include acupuncture, moxibustion, acupoint plaster application, and ear seed therapy, all of which hold profound clinical significance.*

Keywords: Recurrent Miscarriage, Etiology, Traditional Chinese Medicine External Therapy.

1. Introduction

Recurrent spontaneous abortion (RSA) refers to the occurrence of two or more consecutive pregnancy losses before 28 weeks of gestation with the same partner, including biochemical pregnancies. The etiology of RSA is complex, involving immunological factors, prothrombotic states, chromosomal abnormalities, and anatomical structural abnormalities. According to relevant literature, the incidence of RSA among women of childbearing age ranges from 1% to 5%, showing an upward trend annually. The probability of spontaneous abortion in subsequent pregnancies among RSA patients reaches as high as 70% to 80%, severely jeopardizing patients' physical and mental health while imposing a heavy burden on families and society. Traditional Chinese medical texts describe recurrent miscarriage as "slip-abortion" or "frequent abortion". The pathogenesis of slip-abortion is complex, arising from insufficient qi and blood failing to nourish the fetus; kidney essence deficiency leading to congenital insufficiency of the fetus; or emotional distress causing liver dysfunction and fetal restlessness. Since the kidneys govern reproduction, the liver stores blood, and the spleen and stomach transform nutrients into qi and blood, the disease involves the kidneys, spleen-stomach, and liver systems, with pathomechanisms often combining deficiency and excess patterns. This study explores the etiology of recurrent miscarriage and external treatment methods in traditional Chinese medicine.

2. Causes of Recurrent Miscarriage

2.1 Deficiency of Both Spleen and Kidney

The spleen and kidneys form the foundation of the two successive days, closely intertwined in their physiological functions. Kidney yang warms and nourishes spleen yang, promoting the spleen and stomach's transformative and transportative functions. The spleen and stomach transform and generate vital substances—qi, blood, and essence—to nourish the innate kidney essence. Fu Qingzhu's Gynecology states: "When essence is abundant, the uterus readily retains sperm; when blood is sufficient, the uterus readily accommodates the fetus—these are the principles of

conception." When spleen and kidney functions are normal, the mother's qi, blood, yin, and yang harmonize, ensuring a stable fetal foundation. Pathologically, spleen failure leads to loss of kidney yang warmth, while kidney failure impairs spleen's ability to generate and nourish vital substances. Dysfunction in both spleen and kidney organs mutually influences each other throughout the development of recurrent spontaneous abortion (RSA), permeating the entire course of the condition. Zhang Jingjing and colleagues propose that spleen-kidney deficiency constitutes the fundamental pathological change underlying RSA. When the spleen generates sufficient qi and the kidneys possess abundant essence, kidney qi becomes robust. The sufficiency or deficiency of kidney qi is intrinsically linked to the proper functioning of the spleen. Nourishing the spleen and stomach, enhancing the transformation and transportation of nutrients from food and drink, and promoting the accumulation of essence and qi are thus essential. Qi Cong and others proposed that when the congenital kidney is robust, the fetal foundation is secure. If kidney yang is deficient, failing to provide warmth and nourishment, cold stagnates in the uterus, causing the fetus to wither and fail to grow. Kidney yin deficiency, depletion of essence and blood, and failure of water to restrain fire lead to yin deficiency and fire excess, easily resulting in fetal restlessness. Kidney qi deficiency, failing to seal and store, and instability of the Chong and Ren vessels lead to miscarriage or abortion. A robust spleen provides nourishment to the fetus. If the spleen and stomach are deficient, it results in three detrimental effects: first, insufficient transformation and transportation lead to deficiency of qi and blood, causing inadequate fetal nourishment and stunted growth; second, impaired spleen function allows dampness to stagnate in the lower jiao, potentially causing edema; third, spleen deficiency with qi weakness causes sinking of central qi and failure to retain the fetus, leading to miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. The Suwen: Linglan Secret Canon states: "The kidneys are the foundation of innate constitution." The kidneys govern reproduction, store reproductive essence, and the uterine ligaments attach to the kidneys. If kidney qi is deficient, the Chong and Ren vessels become unstable, causing the fetus to lose its anchorage. If kidney essence is depleted, blood deficiency in the Chong and Ren vessels deprives the fetus of

nourishment. If kidney yin is exhausted, latent heat disturbs the Chong and Ren vessels, disrupting the Sea of Blood. If kidney yang is deficient, the Chong and Ren vessels fail to receive warmth, leaving the fetal membranes cold and deficient—all of which may lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes such as spontaneous abortion.

2.2 Blood Stasis

Wang Qingren stated in Medical Forest Corrections: “There are often cases where multiple pregnancies are lost consecutively. This occurs because blood occupies the uterine cavity beforehand, preventing it from entering the fetal sac. The blood flows out from the sides and downward, hence bleeding is observed first. Since the blood fails to enter the fetal sac, the fetus lacks nourishment and thus miscarries.” Blood stasis may arise from external pathogenic factors, internal emotional distress, lifestyle injuries, or physical trauma. This impedes the descent of fresh blood to the uterus, depriving the fetus of nourishment and restricting its growth and development, leading to recurrent spontaneous abortion. Li Weili and colleagues proposed that stagnant blood impedes the generation of new blood, leading to insufficient vitality for fetal development after conception and recurrent miscarriages due to inadequate nourishment of the fetus. They advocated a treatment approach centered on resolving blood stasis, addressing the condition through: - Tonifying the kidneys to resolve blood stasis - Promoting blood circulation to resolve stasis - Clearing heat to resolve stasis - Boosting qi and nourishing blood to resolve stasis. Professor Luo Songping posits that blood stasis serves both as a pathogenic factor and a pathological product. Recurrent miscarriages in RSA patients readily lead to stagnant blood accumulating in the uterus. Kidney qi deficiency damages the Chong and Ren vessels and uterine meridians. Should pregnancy occur again, the descent of essence and blood to nourish the fetus obstructs the Chong and Ren vessels, impeding the smooth flow of qi and blood, thereby promoting the formation of blood stasis.

2.3 Emotional Imbalance

The heart reigns supreme among the five viscera and six bowels, while the liver governs the free flow of qi. A woman’s emotional activities are commanded by the spirit of the heart, maintaining a profound connection with the liver. Zhu Danxi posited that abortion stems from “exhaustion and anger damaging the emotions, stirring internal fire.” Since anger is the emotion associated with the liver, he believed that repeated abortions are linked to internal liver fire. Fu Qingzhu’s Gynecology also notes that pregnant women prone to impatience and anger may experience spontaneous abortion due to uncontrolled liver fire. As the wood element’s fire, the liver is easily agitated and difficult to calm. Anger causes excessive liver qi to transform into fire, which consumes vital energy. Unchecked fire disturbs yin blood, depletes essence, and exhausts qi, thereby weakening the body’s capacity to sustain and nourish the fetus, leading to miscarriage.

3. Traditional Chinese Medicine Approaches for Recurrent Miscarriage

3.1 Acupuncture Therapy

Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medical therapy that offers significant advantages and unique efficacy in treating recurrent miscarriage. Records indicate its use in managing female pregnancy date back to the Song Dynasty. Based on the theory of meridians, acupuncture for recurrent miscarriage leverages the interconnected nature of meridians. Through various point combinations, it regulates the flow of qi throughout the body to nourish and regulate the Chong and Ren meridians, thereby achieving the goal of stabilizing and securing the fetus. Liu Quanbin and colleagues developed an acupuncture protocol based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) syndrome differentiation and treatment principles, holistic concepts, modern physiological research, and clinical practice. The protocol focuses on “tonifying the spleen and boosting qi, regulating the Chong and Ren vessels, fortifying the kidneys, and nourishing blood.” Primary points include Shenshu (BL23), Mingmen (GV4), and Guanyuan (CV4), supplemented by Zusani (ST36), Xuehai (SP10), and Sanyinjiao (SP6). This approach simultaneously tonifies qi, nourishes blood, and fortifies the kidneys. The combination of these six points benefits the liver and kidneys while strengthening the spleen and stomach. Together, they regulate the Chong and Ren vessels, consolidate kidney qi, and replenish essence. This approach restores women’s blood and qi, fortifies kidney qi, regulates menstruation to promote conception, and stabilizes the fetus. Research by Wu Liqun et al. suggests that acupuncture at the Guanyuan, Shenque, Xuehai, Diji, and Sanyinjiao points synergistically promotes blood circulation, disperses stasis, expels old blood, generates new blood, and nourishes the fetus. Acupuncture at Baihui, Sishencong, Yintang, Taichong, and Neiguan points, when used together, regulates the spirit, soothes the mind, calms the liver, and relieves depression. This helps achieve smooth qi circulation, harmonious organ function, and balanced qi, blood, yin, and yang within the body, thereby promoting pregnancy and fetal development. Feng Xiaoling et al. treated recurrent miscarriage in women with positive antiphospholipid antibodies by selecting acupuncture points based on Traditional Chinese Medicine syndrome differentiation principles of tonifying the kidneys and resolving blood stasis prior to pregnancy. Points selected included Shenshu (BL23), Guanyuan (CV4), and Diaoyu (BL17), yielding satisfactory therapeutic outcomes. The advantage of acupuncture in treating recurrent miscarriage lies in its proactive regulation of constitutional health. By stimulating the self-regulatory capacity of meridian points, it restores harmonious balance to the kidney-tian gu-chong and ren vessels-uterus reproductive axis. This fundamentally enhances the mother’s ability to sustain pregnancy, fully embodying traditional Chinese medicine’s advanced principles of “treating the root cause of disease” and “preventing illness before it occurs.”

3.2 Moxibustion

Moxibustion is a therapeutic method that uses mugwort leaves as its primary material. It involves applying heat cauterization and fumigation to acupoints or affected areas on the human body. Through its medicinal properties and thermal stimulation, it activates the flow of qi within the meridians to regulate disrupted physiological and biochemical functions. This achieves the objectives of warming and promoting the circulation of qi and blood, unblocking meridians and

collaterals, strengthening the body's defenses while expelling pathogens, and preventing and treating diseases. Research by Jin Hao et al. found that the combination of Tongren Huayu Zhuyu Tang (a decoction for promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis to aid conception) with moxibustion therapy demonstrated greater efficacy in improving clinical symptoms of kidney deficiency with blood stasis syndrome and facilitating successful pregnancy compared to traditional Western medical treatments or standalone Chinese herbal therapy. Research by Zhu Xiaohong et al. indicates that low molecular weight heparin combined with moxibustion therapy demonstrates significantly greater clinical efficacy than heparin alone in treating recurrent miscarriage patients and improving pregnancy outcomes. Liu Yuhua et al.'s study suggests that pre-pregnancy treatment for recurrent miscarriage using Chinese herbal medicine focused on promoting blood circulation and clearing heat, combined with moxibustion at the Sanyinjiao acupoint, yields superior results compared to using Chinese herbal medicine or Western medicine alone. Artemisia argyi (Ai Ye) is warm in nature, pungent and bitter in taste, and mildly toxic. It enters the Liver, Spleen, and Kidney meridians, possessing effects such as dispelling cold and alleviating pain, warming the meridians and stopping bleeding, and stabilizing pregnancy. It is a commonly used herb in Traditional Chinese Medicine for treating gynecological disorders. The gentle heat generated through combustion, combined with its pharmacological effects, targets specific acupoints on the human body (such as Guanyuan, Shenque, Mingmen, and Zusanli). This approach directly reaches the meridians and internal organs, delivering significant warming and tonifying benefits. Moxibustion therapy is not merely a localized heat treatment but a holistic constitutional regulation method. By stimulating the body's inherent yang energy and self-repair capabilities, it fundamentally addresses factors like "kidney deficiency" and "spleen deficiency" that contribute to recurrent miscarriage. This fully embodies Traditional Chinese Medicine's philosophy of "preventing damage before it occurs", making it a safe, effective, and irreplaceable green therapy for patients experiencing recurrent miscarriage.

3.3 Acupoint Application

The therapy of applying medicated patches to acupoints was first documented in the Fifty-Two Prescriptions for Diseases. Rooted in traditional Chinese medicine theory and guided by the principles of holistic thinking and syndrome differentiation, it involves selecting specific acupoints based on meridian theory and applying appropriate medicinal substances. Through meridian stimulation and the effects of the herbs, this therapy regulates the yin and yang of the internal organs, unblocks the flow of qi and blood within the meridians, thereby achieving the goal of preventing and treating diseases. Lin Yan's research found that combining the modified Diaochong Decoction with pregnancy-preserving patches (containing 9 g Cuscuta seed, 9 g Boehmeria root, 9 g Dipsacus root, 9 g Artemisia leaf, 9 g Codonopsis root, and 9 g Bletilla rhizome) significantly improved treatment outcomes for recurrent miscarriage. The herbs were ground into powder, mixed with vinegar to form a paste, and applied to the patient's Spleen Shu (BL21), Kidney Shu (BL23), Yongquan, Zusanli, uterus, Guanyuan, Shenque, and Zhongwan acupoints. This approach enhances treatment

success rates for recurrent miscarriage, alleviates disease symptoms, improves patients' coagulation-fibrinolysis indicators, and increases pregnancy preservation success rates. Research by Chui Yanfei et al. suggests that the Kidney-Tonifying and Blood-Activating Formula combined with acupoint application (using Cuscuta seed, Dipsacus root, Taxillus chinensis, Eucommia bark, donkey-hide gelatin, Angelica root, Ligusticum root, Atractylodes rhizome, Perilla stem, Amomum fruit, and fried licorice root) paired with the Guanyuan acupoint can tonify the kidneys and nourish the essence. Zusanli (ST36) fortifies the middle burner and boosts qi; Shenshu (BL23) alleviates pain and replenishes kidney essence; Zigong (CV17) unblocks the uterus and resolves stasis. Through synergistic drug-acupoint interaction, this approach reduces symptoms and signs in recurrent miscarriage patients, enhances pregnancy success rates, improves uterine arterial blood flow perfusion, optimizes hormone secretion levels, and lowers serum antibody titers. Liu Wenjuan et al. found that combining Shoutai Pills with acupoint plaster application (using traditional Chinese herbs including Cuscuta seed, Taxillus chinensis, Dipsacus root, Eucommia bark, Codonopsis root, Astragalus root, and ramie root—each 10 g—ground into powder, mixed with water into a paste, and applied to the Guanyuan point and both Shenshu points) can effectively enhance treatment outcomes for patients with unexplained recurrent miscarriage. Additionally, the combined therapy was beneficial in improving patients' Traditional Chinese Medicine symptom scores and sex hormone levels. Acupoint patch therapy demonstrates remarkable efficacy in treating recurrent miscarriage. Compared to oral medication alone, it bypasses the liver's first-pass effect and avoids gastrointestinal irritation, enabling direct and sustained action. Through gradual transdermal absorption, the medication acts gently, reducing potential risks associated with long-term use. Its simple application makes adherence easy, particularly suitable for sustained preconception care. In summary, acupoint patch therapy organically combines medicinal efficacy with acupoint effects, serving as a safe, convenient, and effective intervention that lays a solid foundation for successful pregnancy.

3.4 Ear Acupuncture with Seed Implantation

The meridian system permeates the entire body, reaching every part. As an integral part of the body, the ear is also closely connected to these meridians. When pathological changes occur in any part of the body, they can be reflected through the meridians to the corresponding area of the auricle or specific auricular points. This phenomenon aids in diagnosis. By stimulating the relevant auricular points, the meridians can be unblocked, promoting the circulation of qi and blood, and restoring the balance of yin and yang. This approach achieves the goal of preventing and treating diseases. Wu Dan et al. employed acupoint plaster application (containing donkey-hide gelatin, eucommia bark, Cuscuta seed, Atractylodes macrocephala, and Taxillus chinensis, each 1 g, applied to the uterus, Guanyuan point, bilateral Shenshu points, Shenque point, and Zhongji point) combined with auricular seed therapy (targeting subcortical, kidney, and spleen zones) alongside low molecular weight heparin treatment can elevate serum hormone levels, alleviate clinical symptoms, and enhance therapeutic outcomes. Research indicates that stimulating subcortical regions of the ear, as

well as the kidney and spleen areas, can strengthen the body's foundation and nourish the spleen and kidneys. Ear acupuncture with seed implantation offers readily available materials, simple procedures, and reliable efficacy without causing significant adverse reactions, demonstrating high clinical value. Qian Yanqing et al. found that the combination of the Kidney-Tonifying and Liver-Soothing Formula with ear seed therapy (targeting sympathetic, endocrine, Shenmen, and subcortical auricular points) demonstrated significant clinical efficacy in treating recurrent miscarriage due to kidney deficiency with liver qi stagnation. This approach reduced anxiety scores, improved clinical symptoms, and elevated serum hormone levels. Sympathetic points in auricular acupuncture regulate autonomic nervous function and alleviate vagus nerve excitation. The Shenmen point possesses sedative and antiemetic properties. The combined application of these points achieves liver qi regulation, meridian unblocking, and sedation. As a distinctive external treatment method in Traditional Chinese Medicine, auricular seed implantation holds unique value in managing recurrent miscarriage. By stimulating specific auricular points (such as Internal Reproductive Organs, Endocrine, Kidney, Liver, Spleen, and Shenmen), it unblocks meridians, regulates organ qi and blood functions, and balances yin and yang. This creates a favorable internal environment for stabilizing fetal development. Clinical practice demonstrates that incorporating ear seed therapy as an adjunct to medication (or for pre-pregnancy constitutional regulation) can effectively alleviate symptoms, stabilize emotions, and optimize endocrine function. This approach plays a positive synergistic role in preventing recurrent miscarriage. In summary, ear seed therapy is a safe, simple, and non-invasive adjunctive treatment. Its core principle lies in holistically regulating the maternal internal environment to support successful pregnancy.

Recurrent miscarriage is a common clinical condition affecting some women. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) offers unique advantages and significant therapeutic efficacy in treating recurrent miscarriage. Through precise TCM pattern differentiation, combining oral decoctions with distinctive TCM therapies such as acupuncture, moxibustion, acupoint plaster application, and ear seed therapy can markedly improve pregnancy outcomes and achieve therapeutic goals.

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