

Healing Ulcers with Ayurveda

Healing from any condition requires knowledge of cause (nidana) and pathology (samprapti). The cause of most ulcers lies in a mixture of vata and pitta provoking factors.

Vata type ulcers occur secondary to the stress of overwhelm and anxiety. This usually occurs in the presence of a vata vitiating lifestyle consisting of stressful life changes, a lack of routines and a diet of cold, dry and light foods such as salads and corn breads.

Vata type ulcers occurs secondary to dryness of the mucous membranes of the stomach and small intestine. Ayurveda^[1] describes this as vata entering the rasa dhatu of the annavaha srota. A dry membrane is unable to protect the underlying tissue from the normal or even low levels of acid present in the digestive system. The result is that the acids burn the tissue resulting first in hyperacidity (a poor term as there is no excess acid) and later in ulceration.

This condition is healed by rebuilding the mucous membrane lining the stomach and intestinal wall. Following a moist or oily diet is beneficial. Cooked foods and herbs with a demulcent quality help hydrate the rasa dhatu. Herbs such as licorice and slippery elm not only provide symptomatic relief but long term healing as well. Treatment of the whole person is always required and hence, the mind must be treated and a proper lifestyle restored.

Pitta type ulcers occur secondary to the stress of intensity. This usually occurs in the presence of a pitta vitiating lifestyle consisting of a highly focused intensity on goal achieving and a diet of hot, spicy foods.

Pitta type ulcers result from excess acid secretions. These secretions overwhelm the protective mucous secretions of the intestinal lining. The result begins as the burning of hyperacidity and later results in ulceration. This is a condition of pitta entering the rasa dhatu of the Annavaha srota.

This condition is healed by reducing the acid secretions as well as rebuilding the mucous lining. A cooling diet is one that reduces acid secretions. By avoiding hot spices and taking in foods with a sweet and bitter taste, acid secretions are minimized. In addition, the mucous membrane should be rebuilt utilizing moist, oily foods with a sweet taste. Hence, combinations of bitter and sweet herbs are most beneficial. The combination of dandelion and licorice roots is a personal favorite of mine. Bleeding if present can be managed with haemostatic herbs such as praval pishti or red raspberry. Praval pishti has the added benefit of being an antacid. As mung dal also has antacid properties and is relatively easy to digest, a diet of mung dal or kitcheree rapidly improves the situation.

The person with pitta vitiation should also be encouraged to relax more and adopt less competitive activities. Hence benefit is gained through treating them mind and adopting a healthy pitta pacifying lifestyle.

Many cases of ulcers are caused by a combination of vata and pitta factors. Hence, a combined approach is often most beneficial. This approach emphasizes the use of the cool and moist qualities such as those found in the sweet taste. Herbs such as licorice root and slippery elm pacify both doshas.

Ulcers and a related hyperacidity are relatively easy conditions for the Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist to manage. Through proper lifestyle and diet along with the right herbs, suffering is reduced and healing takes place.

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Published on CA College of Ayurveda (<http://www.ayurvedacollege.com>)

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