

Basic Patterns of Distress: Psychology meets Traditional Constitutional Types

A Working Model

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Accompaniment for *Herbs and Somatic Practices for Stress, Trauma and Resilience*

IHS, 2017

Key Actions for Stress and Resilience

- adaptogen (regulates HPA axis and functional recovery)
- nervine (regulates NS activity, trophorestorative)
- anti-inflammatory, immunomodulant
- digestive support (e.g bitter, aromatic, astringent/vulnerary)
- prebiotic and probiotic (aka “psychobiotics”)
- circulatory stimulant and lymphatic
- mineral-rich herbs, nutrient-dense “special foods” (for specific vitamins, minerals, fats, etc.)

For each presentation, nervines and adaptogens are listed with the understanding that many/most of these plants fulfill the additional necessary actions, as well. I have also included a few plants that don't fall into either action category, but bear special mention.

Also note that stimulating adaptogens (e.g. eleuthero, schisandra, rhodiola, ginseng) are included here to guide use, but should not be considered the primary or first course of action. I find they are relatively rarely indicated and are most useful as short-term support.

Type A (active/aggravated?)

Hot/Excessive/Dry/Tense

This presentation usually involves agitation, irritability and anger, anxiety, insomnia, digestive discomforts involving inflammation and diarrhea, headaches and general neuromuscular tension. Folks with more hot, tense constitutions would *most likely* express in this way. If the heat is extreme, a person is more likely to have dried out. Often this presentation involves just pushing through, staying busy and masking difficulty. The anxiety and insomnia are often rooted in concern about how to get things done (and done *right*) or in overwhelm at one's responsibilities. Many times, others may not realize this person is depressed because they can still be engaged and productive. These folks are still somewhat resilient and likely haven't exhausted their endocrine resilience capacity yet, but they might be getting there. Inflammation will be a big player and these may be the type to have cardiovascular conditions and hypersensitivities.

Goals: cool and relax to calm digestion, reduce irritability, anxiety, headache, muscular tension, overt inflammation, insomnia

Key herbs:

** use w/care with some medications, **avoid in liver damage, ^avoid high dose in hypothyroidism, ^^avoid high dose in hypertension*

Nervines: rose, linden, hawthorn, chamomile, lavender, blue vervain, motherwort, skullcap, wood betony, ginkgo, gotu kola, mimosa flower and/or bark, hops, kava**, Baikal skullcap

Adaptogens: eleuthero, licorice, raw rehmannia, red peony

Special additions:

Digestives: dandelion, gentian, artichoke

Anti-inflammatories: Dan shen (*Salvia miltiorrhiza*)

Type B (boggy/blasé?)

Cool/Moist/Relaxed/Stagnant

Here, we're most likely to see sluggish, damp digestion, foggy thinking, low energy and motivation, low self-esteem, worry, possibly over-eating or comfort-eating, hypersomnia, hypothyroidism, metabolic syndrome and obesity. They often have the resources they need, yet lack the spark to mobilize them. Waste materials build up, circulation of blood and lymph is slow and brain function may suffer. There can be endocrine dysregulation involving the HPA axis, but just as often there are blood sugar and thyroid issues taking center stage. This presentation may most closely resemble the classic depressive picture.

Goals: warm, dry and move stagnation, improve digestion and elimination, cognition and motivation, blood and lymph circulation

Key herbs:

Nervines: lemon balm, damiana, rosemary, lavender, valerian, purple bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*), mugwort, turmeric, garden sage and clary sage, St John's wort*, anise hyssop

Adaptogens: sacred basil, eleuthero, schisandra*, rhodiola

Special additions:

Digestives: orange peel

Circulatory Stimulants and Lymphatics (in addition to above): cinnamon, ginger, prickly ash, calendula

Type C (combo/changeable?)

Warm/Moist/Lax

This pattern draws on both the tendencies of types A and B. This type seems less likely to be distressed than A, but perhaps less resilient in the face of challenge, while elements of the B type suggest a tendency towards stagnation, low motivation and depression. These folks are likely to have a combination of slower metabolism, or ease of weight gain, coupled with inflammatory conditions like cardiovascular disease, auto-immunity, and diabetes. See types A and B for more possible presentations, which are likely to be combined in various ways in this combo type.

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Goals: cool, move and/or tone; address inflammation and other immune dysregulation, while improving circulation and motivation

Key herbs:

Nervines: gotu kola, ginkgo, rose, skullcap, chamomile, anise hyssop, wood betony, lavender, mugwort, angelica, rosemary, turmeric, Baikal skullcap

Adaptogens: reishi, holy basil, red peony, raw rehmannia, rhodiola

Special additions:

Digestives: dandelion, artichoke

Circulatory stimulants and lymphatics: cleavers, red clover

Type D (distressed/depleted?)

Cold/Dry/Depleted/Tense

This is often a fearful, anxious presentation. The person is often exhausted, but can't sleep, especially from waking in the night. They may have poor appetite and weight loss and nervous tension affecting the skeletal and smooth muscles, so the digestion and frame suffer. They may have the look of a frightened rabbit and, recognizing their own vulnerability, are often on edge, agitated and jumpy. Being close to exhausting their resources, these are the depleted folks who need rest, nourishment, relaxation and safety.

Goals: improve assimilation and intake to increase moisture and nourishment, build blood, relax to enhance circulation and warmth, release spasm, reduce anxiety, ground and protect

**Many warming herbs are a bit dry for these folks, so add moisture with licorice, for example.*

Key herbs:

Nervines: oats, skullcap, mugwort, lemon balm, lavender, anise hyssop, red bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), gotu kola, mimosa bark, rose, hawthorn, passion flower, wood betony, kava**, anemone (low dose botanical)

Adaptogens: ashwagandha, licorice^^, maca, shatavari, cooked rehmannia, dang quai, sacred basil, codonopsis, astragalus, white peony, eleuthero, Asian or American ginseng (only in severe circumstances)

Special additions:

Digestives: burdock, fennel, cardamom, cinnamon, angelica

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