



A New Breakthrough in the Treatment of Ichthyosis

Jian Zhang, Yan Li

Beijing Zhang Jian Ichthyosis Research Institute, Beijing, China

Abstract: Ichthyosis, known in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as "snake-skin lichen," is a condition historically described as scaly skin resembling snake scales. Pathogenic Wind causes this condition by obstructing the striae, which leads to sluggish blood and qi and a failure to moisturize the skin. This study explores the TCM perspective on ichthyosis and evaluates the efficacy of Zhang Jian Therapy, a treatment developed through 23 years of clinical practice. This therapy identifies the root cause in the kidneys, the root basis in the spleen, and the superficial manifestation in the lungs. As a patented TCM external treatment in both China and the U.S., it uses a unique fumigation method to activate a patented herbal formula, allowing rapid skin penetration. Clinically validated, it achieves therapeutic results approximately 20 times more effective than conventional oral medications or skincare products. It overcomes the limitations of Western treatments, which are rapid-acting but have significant adverse reactions, and traditional remedies, which are slow-acting. By improving both the skin and internal organs without harming the liver, spleen, or kidneys, Zhang Jian Therapy delivers remarkable outcomes and addresses the core imbalance of yin and yang in ichthyosis.

Keywords: Ichthyosis; Snake skin; Fish scale skin; Snake-skin lichen

1. Origin of Ichthyosis

Ichthyosis was first recorded in *Treatise on the Etiology and Symptoms of Diseases*, a classic work of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) dating back to 610 AD, with the original description: "The skin is like snake skin with scales, which is called snake body disease." It is also known as snake skin tinea, snake body disease, etc.

2. TCM Understanding of Ichthyosis

In TCM theory, ichthyosis is caused by stagnant circulation of qi and blood that fails to moisturize the skin, or by pathogenic wind lingering in the muscles that impairs the nutrient supply to the skin.

TCM adheres to the fundamental principle of "treating diseases by addressing their root causes" for ichthyosis treatment. Based on 23 years of clinical practice with a large number of cases and diagnostic experience, combined with insights into ichthyosis, Zhang Jian Therapy has reorganized the core of ichthyosis treatment methods as follows:

From the perspective of zang-fu organ syndrome differentiation, ichthyosis has its root in the kidney, fundamental basis in the spleen, and superficial manifestation in the lung. Patients typically suffer from kidney essence and kidney qi deficiency, accompanied by splenic hypofunction in transportation and transformation as well as insufficient lifting capacity—unable to convert ingested food and fluids into absorbable nutrients for the human body. This leads to inadequate production and poor circulation of acquired qi and blood. The lung relies on the nutrient supply from the spleen to perform its physiological functions, so splenic hypofunction impairs the lung's dispersing function, preventing nutritious refined substances from being transported to the skin surface and extremities, which in turn results in hyperkeratosis.

Symptoms of ichthyosis usually appear a few days or months after birth, characterized by rough and scaly skin. In severe cases, infants may be born enveloped in a collodion-like membrane, which ruptures to form scales afterward.

3. A Complication of Ichthyosis: Ichthyotic Streaks

In TCM, the formation of skin patches is attributed to "stasis", with qi stagnation and blood stasis being the fundamental pathological change. Patches may arise from emotional internal injury leading to liver depression and qi stagnation that causes blood stasis; splenic hypofunction impairing its functions of governing blood and transforming dampness, can result in internal obstruction by phlegm-dampness and subsequent qi stagnation and blood stasis; kidney qi deficiency causing excessive internal yin and impeded blood circulation that leads to stasis; or lung qi deficiency weakening the dispersing function, leaving the skin surface insufficiently nourished and moisturized, also resulting in patches.

Many ichthyosis patients have faint or mild streaks all over the body. Based on 23 years of clinical experience in treating ichthyosis with Zhang Jian Therapy, the causes of these streaks are summarized as follows:

(1) Blood Deficiency: Insufficient blood volume fails to moisturize the deep or superficial layers of local skin, and it

also leads to poor subcutaneous microcirculation and slow blood flow, which also prevents adequate local skin moisture. If either of these conditions occurs in a localized area, it results in deficient fire, after it stays for several days, it can lead to the formation of streak-like patterns, which generally appear in the epidermal layer.

(2) Liver Depression and Qi Stagnation: The liver stores blood. When liver qi becomes depressed and stagnant, qi stagnation leads to blood stasis, creating obstacles to the circulation of qi and blood. In this pathological state of qi stagnation and blood stasis, metabolic waste accumulated in the skin interstices cannot be removed by qi and blood, and thus precipitates to form streaks and patches.

In addition, patients with this type of condition often have specific personality traits, such as a short temper and impatient disposition. Female patients may experience irregular menstrual cycles. Upon close observation, the streaks and patches tend to darken during menstruation and fade after it ends in most cases.

4. TCM Etiological Analysis of Ichthyosis by Zhang Jian Therapy

Through 23 years of clinical practice and prescription refinement, Zhang Jian Therapy has exclusively revealed that ichthyosis has its root in the kidney, fundamental basis in the spleen, and superficial manifestation in the lung. The kidney is the foundation of innate constitution and the root of vital qi; abundant kidney qi warms and nourishes the spleen. Ichthyosis patients suffer from congenital insufficiency and kidney essence and kidney qi deficiency. The spleen is the foundation of acquired constitution and the source of vital qi production; through acquired transportation and transformation, it converts ingested food and fluid essences into absorbable nutrients for the human body, which are then distributed to the skin and extremities to moisturize and nourish them by virtue of the spleen's function of lifting the clear and yang qi.

Innate constitution nourishes the acquired constitution. Congenital insufficiency and kidney essence and kidney qi deficiency in ichthyosis patients lead to splenic hypofunction in transportation and transformation—corresponding to the genetic factor in Western medicine—resulting in the loss of qi and blood nourishment in the extremities and skin surface, which forms scales, streaks, hyperkeratosis, as well as the rough and aged appearance of hands and feet (commonly known as "elderly hands and feet").

The above pathological changes cause hypoplasia and functional disorders of the three major glands (sweat glands, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands) in ichthyosis patients.

Traditional oral medications are difficult to exert their efficacy at the lesion site through the digestive system, leading to a very slow onset of effect; long-term administration also burdens the liver and kidneys, forming a vicious cycle.

Topical hormonal ointments only act on the surface of scales, so they take effect quickly but fail to restore skin function, leading to frequent recurrence. Long-term use causes severe damage to the skin and increases the difficulty of treatment.

Ordinary moisturizing products are also unable to repair the hypoplasia and dysfunction of the three major glands (sweat glands, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands).

5. The Therapeutic Approach of Zhang Jian Therapy for Ichthyosis

With 23 years of clinical experience in treating ichthyosis, Zhang Jian Therapy leverages the skin's inherent permeability to deliver medicinal ingredients into the skin, and combines with medicinal fumigation to apply the medicine directly to the lesion site, achieving both superficial and internal therapeutic effects.

Medicinal fumigation dilates skin capillaries, promotes the circulation and metabolism of blood and lymph, and facilitates the rapid elimination of pathogenic factors from the body through sweat glands.

The fumigation therapy of Zhang Jian Therapy for ichthyosis possesses the following advantages:① Utilizing medicines with the effects of softening hard masses and dissipating stagnation to quickly remove superficial scales;② Unblocking the three major glands (sweat glands, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands) to restore their development and metabolic functions;③ Adopting blood-activating and tissue-regenerating ingredients from pure plant-based Chinese medicines to nourish the basal cells of the epidermis;④ Being safe and reliable with no toxic or side effects.

A unique step of Zhang Jian Therapy is that the skin surface is directly scrubbed and stimulated with an exfoliating mitten after each fumigation session. This physical stimulation directly promotes hair follicle development, which is one of the key reasons why the fumigation therapy has achieved excellent clinical outcomes in the treatment of ichthyosis.

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Author Bio

Jian Zhang (1932-), female, graduated from Tianjin Medical University (undergraduate), and is the director of the Zhang Jian Ichthyosis Research Institute in Beijing. The "Zhang Jian Therapy" invented by her has obtained national patent technology recognition (patent number: 03121032.5) and US patent recognition (patent number: US9241966 B1).

Yan Li (1981-), female, master's student, studied under Dean Zhang Jian in 2003. In 2017, she founded the Beijing Zhang Jian Ichthyosis Care Center, dedicated to assisting the ichthyosis community in impoverished families and promoting ichthyosis related knowledge to the public.