

Nephritis & Nephrosis

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"Basically, I no longer work for anything but the sensation I have while working."

- sculptor Albert Giacometti -

Our kidneys, the pair of organs located in the lumbar (lower back) region, are involved in functions of filtration, regulation and excretion. They share the stage with intestinal and liver filtration to keep the blood healthy and clean. They excrete various end products of body metabolism in the form of urine, and regulate the concentrations of various ions in the extracellular fluid, including hydrogen, sodium and potassium.

Inside each kidney is a network of tiny blood vessels that filter the blood, removing waste products. In a typical human lifetime, enough fluid passes through the delicate tubules to fill a railroad boxcar. The delicate nature of the kidney vessels renders them vulnerable to weakness, especially in the presence of aggravating conditions like diabetes and hypertension.

Nephritis is a general term for inflammation of the kidneys, which causes the filtration system to break down. There are many types. Nephrosis refers to degenerative changes in the kidneys and renal tubules that result from disease. When the kidney's filtering vessels are damaged, proteins can leak out into the urine, and waste products accumulate in the blood.

Nephritis and nephrosis are often secondary problems that result from other diseases. Early signs of kidney problems include edema, anemia and various salt imbalances. These symptoms can result from various conditions including nutritional imbalances, hepatitis, urinary diseases, liver and spleen problems, heart disease, abdominal tumors, connective tissue diseases, and diabetes. Any causative conditions must be treated individually. As a kidney problem becomes more serious, urine concentrations of albumin and creatinine increase. A simple urine "dip stick" test can detect these substances. Your doctor can also perform a more sensitive microalbumin test for tiny amounts of albumin.

Herbal Treatment of Nephritis and Nephrosis

- **Nettle seed tincture** is emerging as a potentially useful treatment for nephritis.
- Low protein diets are always prescribed for severe kidney disorders because they lessen the metabolic strain on the kidneys. However, the prescriptions rarely specify the types of protein that should remain in the diet. As a rule, vegetable protein is much easier on the kidneys.
- Avoidance of low quality fats and oils helps reduce kidney inflammation. By the same token, use of essential fatty acid supplements **can help with many renal disorders**.
- Vitamin E supplementation has been shown to slow the progression of nephropathy (Kuemmerle et al 1999).

- A traditional TAM formula for treating progressive kidney disorders combines **shilajatu** and **triphala**. Dose: 2 grams twice a day.
- Many of the ingredients in the well-known TCM formula called Rehmanna 6 have shown to be **effective for nephritis**, according to Chinese researchers. It contains **cooked rehmannia root**, **astragalus root**, **cornus fruit** (shan zhu yu or *C. officinalis*), **moutan bark** (mu dan pi or *Paeonia suffruticosa*), **water plantain rhizome** (Ze xie or *Alisma plantago-aquatica*) and **wild yam root** (han yao or *Dioscorea opposita*). Other useful TCM herbs include **cordyceps mushroom**, **rhubarb root** and **salvia root**.
- Animal studies have shown the simple combination of **astragalus root** and **cooked rehmannia root** to be a markedly effective treatment for protein and blood in the urine, causing improvement and recovery of renal functions, and reduction of edema, anemia, and anorexia. The combination had no adverse effects on functions of the liver, kidney, heart and GI tract (Su 1993).
- According to Japanese researchers, combining a TCM formula with low-dose prednisone treatment in autoimmune nephritis is a superior protocol to using either treatment alone (Nakai et al 1998). The tested formula contained **white peony root**, **dang gui root**, **tangerine peel**, **astragalus root**, **cinnamon bark**, **ginseng root**, **white atractylodes**, **cooked rehmannia root**, **schisandra berry**, **poria mushroom** and **poygala root** (yuan zhi or *P. tenuifolia*).
- The Heibei Provincial hospital reported their findings in a study of 89 cases of chronic nephritis divided into 5 TCM diagnostic categories and treated accordingly. Researchers found that the curative effect of the treatments was closely related to control of blood in the urine and improvement of microcirculation (Sun, 1993). This suggests first that herbs like **salvia root** and **tien chi root**, as well as herbs from the vessel strengthening group, would provide positive results, and secondly that professional TCM diagnosis may be critical to outcome.