

Varicocele & Male Sterility

abstracted & translated by

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Varicocele refers to abnormal dilation of the pampiniform plexus vein draining the testes and is the most common anatomic abnormality causing male infertility. Twenty-five percent of infertile men suffer from varicocele and the incidence of this condition is estimated to be 10-15% of the general population. Varicocele results in infertility because it causes pooling of blood and higher intrascrotal temperatures. In Western medicine, varicoceles are treated surgically via ligation of the internal spermatic vein. This procedure has reportedly resulted in 30-50% pregnancy rates in uncontrolled studies. In issue #11, 2002 of the *Zhe Jiang Zhong Yi Za Zhi (Zhejiang Journal of Chinese Medicine)*, Sun Zi-xue published an article titled, "The Treatment of 65 Cases of Sterility Due to Varicocele with *Yi Shen Tong Luo Fang* (Boost the Kidneys & Free the Flow of the Network Vessels Formula)." Since this protocol purports to offer a nonsurgical treatment of this condition, a summary of its most important parts is given below. This article appeared on page 475 of the original Chinese journal.

Cohort description:

Of the 65 men included in this study, the youngest was 24 and the oldest was 40 years old, with a median age of 30.1 ± 4.18 years. The

shortest duration of disease was two years and the longest was 10, with an a mean disease course of 3.3 ± 1.53 years. Fifteen cases experienced grade 1 varicocele, 30 cases grade 2, and 15 cases grade 3. In five cases, there were no obvious clinical symptoms but ultrasound showed varicocele. Forty-nine of the men in this study suffered from primary onset infertility and 16 from secondary onset infertility. In eight cases, there was oligospermia, in 48 cases there was poor sperm motility, and in nine cases there was both oligospermia and poor motility. Twenty-one cases had already been treated surgically with ligation of the internal spermatic vein.

Treatment method:

Yi Shen Tong Luo Fang consisted of: cooked Radix Rehmanniae (*Shu Di*) and Radix Astragali Membranacei (*Huang Qi*), 20g each, Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae (*Dan Shen*), 30g, Semen Cuscutae Chinensis (*Tu Si Zi*), Herba Epimedii (*Xian Ling Pi*), Radix Morindae Officinalis (*Ba Ji Tian*), and Radix Cyathulae (*Chuan Niu Xi*), 15g each, and Hirudo Seu Whitmania (*Shui Zhi*), 3g ground into powder and swallowed with the decoction. If there was dampness of the scrotum, 20 grams of Semen Plantaginis (*Che Qian Zi*) and 15 grams of uncooked Semen Coicis Lachryma-jobi (*Yi Yi Ren*) were added. If testicular sagging, distention, and pain was asevere, 12 grams of Semen Litchi Chinensis (*Li Zhi He*) and 15 grams of vinegar-processed Rhizoma Corydalis Yanhusuo (*Yan Hu Suo*) were added. One packet of these medicinals was decocted in water and administered orally per day in divided doses. Three month equaled one course of treat-

ment, and the ejaculate was examined each month during treatment. If there was conception, the medicinals were stopped.

Treatment outcomes:

Eleven of the 65 cases were considered cured. This meant that their partner conceived. This also meant that the cure rate was 16.92%. Another 25 patients experienced what was termed a marked effect. Although these men's partners did not conceive, their sperm count increased and their sperm motility returned to normal. A further 18 patients got some effect. This was defined as an increase in sperm count and improvement in sperm motility. Eleven patients got no effect. Therefore, the total amelioration rate was 83.07%.

Discussion:

According to Dr. Sun of the Henan Provincial Chinese Medical Hospital, although all patients with varicocele have stasis obstructing the vessels and network vessels, the main disease mechanism of their infertility is kidney qi debility and vacuity. Based on the author's long clinical experience in treating this condition, he believes that it should be treated by boosting the kidneys and

quickening the blood, transforming stasis and freeing the flow of the network vessels. Therefore, within the formula he has used *Shu Di* and *Tu Si Zi* supplement the kidneys, nourish yin, and foster the essence. *Xian Ling Pi* and *Ba Ji Tian* warm the kidneys and invigorate yang. *Dan Shen* and *Chuan Niu Xi* quicken the blood, transform stasis, and free the flow of the network vessels. *Chuan Niu Xi* can also lead the other medicinals to move downward to reach the site of the disease. A small amount of *Shui Zhi* is used to enter the blood aspect and break and crack static blood, scatter nodulation and free the flow of the network vessels. *Huang Qi* is used because the qi commands the movement of the blood. By boosting the qi, one can also quicken the blood. When *Huang Qi* is combined with *Shui Zhi*, *Huang Qi* supplements without causing congestion and stagnation and *Shui Zhi* breaks the blood without damaging the righteous. As this clinical trial shows, when oligospermia and decreased sperm motility are due to varicocele, this formula is able to get good improvement in those conditions. As Dr. Sun notes, the total marked effectiveness rate was 55.38%.

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