

Key Blood-Building Strategies

By Andrew Gaeddert, BA, AHG

The best ways to build blood include iron supplementation, especially liquid iron, along with vitamin B12 and folic acid. Blood-building foods include animal liver, brewer's yeast (which is rich in B vitamins), bone marrow soup, colostrum and black strap molasses.

Other iron-rich foods include kidneys, apricots, greens, lamb, oysters, soy foods, duck, goose, lam, raisins, spinach and mushrooms.

Herbs such as nettles and alfalfa can be incorporated into the diet to improve iron utilization. For example, nettles can be added to greens, soups and smoothies.

The traditional formula **eight treasures** (*ba zhen tang*) has been used for thousands of years to treat anemia, fatigue, pale complexion, cold limbs, post-menstrual depletion, amenorrhea and uterine bleeding. It consists of *tang kuei*, rehmannia and peony (the chief blood-building herbs in Chinese medicine); ligusticum (which is traditionally used to improve blood circulation and aid in new blood formation); atractylodes and poria (to strengthen digestion); codonopsis and licorice (to tonify the *qi*); and ginger and red dates, which improve the absorption of the other herbs in the formula. Another common blood-building formula used in Chinese medicine is *gui pi tang*, often called shen gem or "gather vitality."

I helped create a formula (consisting of milletia, *he shou wu*, salvia, codonopsis, astragalus, ligusticum, raw rehmannia, cooked rehmannia, lycium, *tang kuei*, lotus seed, citrus, red date extract, oryza and gelatinum) which was the subject of a clinical study at the University of California San Francisco to improve chronic anemia. It is especially useful for HIV and cancer patients with low red and white blood cells.

While seeing clients, I often employ the use of eight treasures in mild cases, or the new formula in cases of severe anemia, in addition to food therapy. Judy, a client with hepatitis C and chronic anemia, is a good example. In addition to recommending herbs such as milk thistle, we had her supplement with the formula

from the UCSF study and eat as many iron-rich foods as possible. As all iron supplements gave her indigestion or constipation, we recommended liquid iron along with supplemental B12 and folic acid. Within three weeks, she reported remarkably better energy.

Another client, Wilma a therapist with a demanding schedule complained of constipation (which is why she couldn't take iron capsules), anemia, low back pain and fatigue. She always felt cold. Her tongue was pale and her pulse thin. We recommended shen gem (consisting of ginseng, poria, white atractylodes, zizphus, astragalus, *tang kuei*, salvia, amber, polygala, longan, saussurea, ginger, licorice and cardamon) to build her blood, and another formula called acquilaria 22 (consisting of ginger, mume, codonopsis, myrobalan, poria, atractylodes, quisqualis, omphalia, saussurea, torreya, pomegranate, melia, rubia, *chi-shih*, nutmeg, cardamon, ulnas, zanthoxylum, licorice and aloe vera) to treat chronic constipation (two tablets of each formula QID). In addition, we recommended liquid iron at one-third of the recommended dosage, as well as consumption of more red meat and cooked greens.

There was slight improvement after one month. Since she was able to tolerate the liquid iron, her dosage was increased to two-thirds and her intake of acquilaria 22 was increased to three tablets QID. As she was still experiencing constipation (two bowel movements per week), we recommended 1-3 tablespoons of ground flax seed added to oatmeal porridge with prunes and raisins. After the second month, she was warmer, had more regular bowel movements and greater energy, and felt less back pain.

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