

## ONE-SIDED BODY ACHES

**Tongue description**

Pale  
*Slightly swollen and uneven edges*  
 Yellow, thin coating at the root

**Chinese diagnosis**

Spleen qi deficiency → blood deficiency  
 Malnourishment of the channels  
 No pathology

**Western diagnosis**

Spina bifida

**Symptoms**

Difficulty walking, occasional numbness and paralysis of the left leg  
 Backache  
 Tiredness

**Background to disease**

Congenital illness  
 Overexertion

**Fig. 2.1.9**  
 Female  
 41 years old



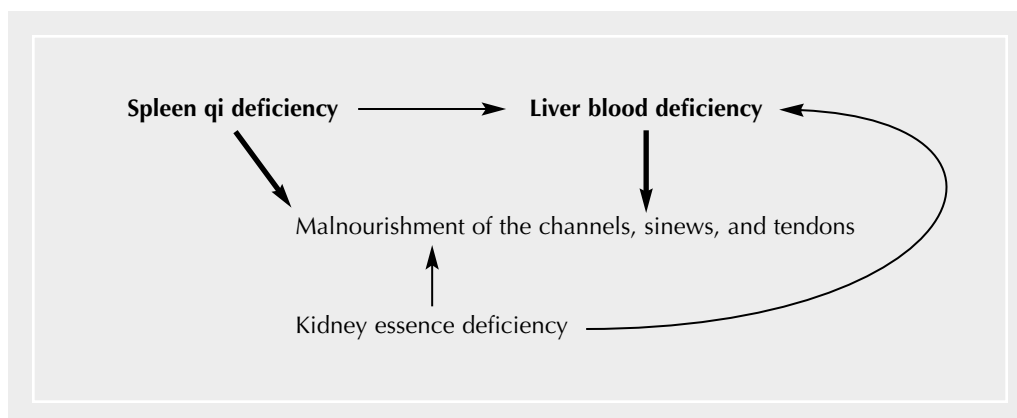
**CASE HISTORY** The patient, a 41-year-old secretary, had been unaware of her bad posture for years, and this resulted in left-sided pain. At the age of six she was diagnosed with spina bifida. In her mid-thirties the left leg became increasingly numb, resulting in occasional bouts of mild paralysis. There was no clear pattern to the appearance of the symptoms, but the patient felt that the numbness and paralysis occurred more when she was under either mental or physical stress. She also had a dull, deep backache in the lumbar region, which could not be attributed to the weather, but which could be brought on by exhaustion. There were no other symptoms, and the patient otherwise enjoyed her life. Her pulse was tight, thin, and weak.

**Analysis.** The uneven sides to the tongue are obvious and are significant. In my experience, this tongue sign develops only after a chronic illness or traumatic injury that causes a one-sided body ache or weakness in the extremities. Uneven sides to the tongue are often an indication of insufficient nourishment in the channels, muscles, sinews, and tendons caused by underlying qi and blood deficiency.<sup>23</sup> In this particular case, the uneven sides are deemed to be a constitutional sign. Therefore, the prognosis for a positive outcome is not favorable.

The patient has spina bifida, which Chinese medicine describes as an atrophy disorder stemming from weakness of the Kidney essence. The onset of numbness and paralysis occurred when the patient was in her mid-thirties. The pathomechanism centers on two factors:

- the congenital illness
- the reduction of qi and blood in the yang brightness channels

The extraordinary vessels also play an important role in the pathology of this patient since they transport Kidney essence to the different regions and tissues of the body.



The congenital weakness of Kidney essence has, in this case, affected the Governing vessel and resulted in undernourishment of the spine. The Girdle vessel is also involved since, as a result of its (inner) pathways, it enfolds the channels of the Stomach, Kidney, and Spleen as well as the Penetrating and Conception vessels. When the energy in the yang brightness channels is weak, the Penetrating vessel and aforementioned channels suffer from a lack of nutritive qi reaching the legs, leading to an overly loose Girdle vessel. “The Girdle vessel is not able to control [the other channels] because the Stomach channel is depleted. The outcome is atrophy and weakness of the leg muscles.”<sup>24</sup>

In women over the age of 35, there is a reduction in the qi and blood in the yang brightness channels (i.e., they are insufficiently fed),<sup>25</sup> which, together with the Penetrating vessel, are responsible for providing nourishment to the sinews, bones, and muscles.<sup>26</sup> Symptoms such as paralysis and/or difficulty in walking result from this energetic weakness. The Penetrating vessel is especially important, since it joins the pre- and postnatal essence.

In this case, only one side of the tongue body is noticeably swollen. A pale tongue body in conjunction with uneven sides indicates that the underlying Spleen qi deficiency has affected only the channels and muscles, but not the organs. Here, as a result of the deficiency, the nutritive qi and blood are depleted. Hence they cannot contribute to the nourishment of the muscles and flesh, which manifests in occasional feelings of numbness and paralysis.<sup>27</sup>

The sinew channel of the Spleen spreads in the chest, and from there, a branch adheres to the spine, thus adding to the supply of qi and blood. Consequently, Spleen qi deficiency can contribute to weakness and stiffness in the spine, especially if the deficiency is intensified by emptiness of the Governing vessel, evidenced here in the deficient nature of her back pains—they are dull and deep and can be triggered by exhaustion.

**Treatment strategy.** Strengthen the Spleen, nourish the blood, regulate the yang brightness channels and the Governing and Girdle vessels.

The patient refused Chinese herbs and was treated with acupuncture alone. After 10 sessions, there was no improvement.