



News Spring 2026

Dear Practitioner,

If we have your email address on file, you may have recently received a survey from us—we hope you had a chance to share your thoughts. One of the questions asked how you prefer to receive our newsletters and monographs, and the majority of respondents indicated a preference for email delivery. We're glad to know this aligns with our current approach, and we remain mindful of not overwhelming your inbox while striving to provide content that is both engaging and useful.

We'll be sending out a few more surveys in the coming months to continue gathering your feedback and learning from your experiences.

All of our updates and communications are currently delivered via email and e-blasts. We hope you've been receiving and enjoying them.

In this issue, we are highlighting an article by Dr. Krystal Couture, a pelvic floor specialist, who explores chronic pelvic pain (CPP). Her insights offer valuable perspectives that may help improve treatment outcomes for patients dealing with this often complex condition.

We are also pleased to feature *Spring: A Seasoned Surfer's Guide* by Peter Firebrace, an experienced practitioner based in Denmark. Drawing from the *Nei Jing*, Peter reflects on the importance of living in harmony with the seasons—something that can be easy to lose in our modern, climate-controlled environments. We hope this piece serves as a gentle reminder of our connection to nature's cycles.

Additionally, Andrew Serman contributes another thoughtful piece on dietary therapy from a Chinese medicine perspective: *Even Stubborn SIBO Can Yield: A Dietary Approach from Within Chinese Medicine*. SIBO remains a challenging condition for many practitioners, but Andrew's clear and practical approach provides tools that can build confidence and support more effective care.

Finally, we encourage you to actively support the growth of Chinese medicine within your community. This can include joining your state professional association and helping educate both the public and other healthcare providers about the benefits of acupuncture and herbal medicine.

As always, our newsletters—past and present—along with a wide range of published papers, are available on our website as a resource. We offer them with sincere gratitude for your continued support, feedback, and engagement.

Thank you for being part of our community.

Sincerely,

John Scott, DOM and Lorena Monda, DOM

Chronic Pelvic Pain and Acupuncture

By Krystal Lynn Couture, DPT, LAc

INTRODUCTION & DEFINITION

Chronic Pelvic Pain (CPP) is persistent or recurring pain in the lower abdomen and pelvis that lasts greater than 3-6 months. CPP can affect many layers of tissue including the organs, viscera, fascia, musculotendinous sinews and the nerves. CPP shares features with other chronic pain syndromes, such as central sensitization, where the nervous system becomes excessively sensitive to painful stimuli. It is often associated with IBS, IC, PID, fibromyalgia and mood disorders. CPP diagnosis is clinical in nature and based upon subjective history and physical examination, which can include pelvic examination and digital rectal examination. Often times, lab tests and imaging are inconclusive, though they may be helpful in the identification and diagnosis of comorbidities (Dydek et al., 2025). CPP is a complex biopsychosocial condition that negatively impacts quality of life and body processes.

EPIDEMIOLOGY & COST BURDEN

Chronic pelvic pain is a challenging condition that affects an estimated 26% of the world's female population. It accounts for 40% of laparoscopies and 12% of hysterectomies in the US annually, even though the origin of CPP is not gynecologic in 80% of patients (Georgine et al., 2021). In 30% of cases, no cause for CPP is ever determined and CPP is often associated with negative cognitive, behavioral, sexual, emotional, and quality of life consequences (Fall et al., 2010). A 2023 study reports that Chronic Pelvic Pain was found to have a cost burden of \$29,951 for services including treatments, diagnostics, and surgeries (Hutton et al., 2023). Chronic Pelvic Pain is poorly understood, poorly managed and has a high cost burden.

CONVENTIONAL MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

Western treatment of CPP includes use of NSAIDs, acetaminophen, hormone replacement therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, spinal cord stimulation and total hysterectomy. According to Dydek et al., 2025, "The treatment of chronic pelvic pain is often challenging, with limited evidence-based options available." The current conventional medical management lacks evidence-based research, diagnostic training across all specialties: urology, gynecology, gastroenterology, pain management and primary care. Furthermore, the medical model fails to offer guidelines for integration of Chinese Medicine, acupuncture, and other conservative modalities which support treatment of CPP.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY MANAGEMENT & ACUPUNCTURE RESEARCH

In recent years, multidisciplinary management has been considered and researched, especially acupuncture. Research suggests that acupuncture may effectively help those struggling with CCP with pain management. Various acupuncture modalities like manual acupuncture, electroacu-

puncture, catgut implantation, moxibustion, abdominal acupuncture, and ear acupuncture, have proven higher treatment efficacy than Western medication or even TCM medication. Moreover, the use of acupuncture as a monotherapy has a higher efficacy for pain management than control interventions such as health education, western medication, physiotherapies, sham acupuncture, and TCM medication for CPP (Lin et al., 2023). Acupuncture modulates chronic pelvic pain through neuroimmune regulation, reducing inflammatory mediators by improving neuromuscular signaling, increasing local blood flow and restoring pelvic floor muscle tone.



ACUPUNCTURE APPROACHES

Sacral Electroacupuncture—Acupuncture Points Used: UB 32-34, the sacral foramina have been used with electroacupuncture to stimulate sacral nerve segments and relieve pain via direct inhibition at the segmental spinal cord level. The sacral nerve roots or sacral plexus and its branches (superior gluteal nerve, inferior gluteal nerve, sciatic nerve, pudendal nerve, and some smaller branches), have both sensory and motor components innervating the gluteal muscles, adductors, hamstrings, pelvic floor, external urethra, external anal sphincter, and posterior rotators of the hip, as well as the sensory function of the posterior thigh and leg, penis, clitoris and the skin of the perineum. Additionally UB 30 and 35 have been used with electroacupuncture specifically to stimulate the pudendal nerve, which is the primary sensory and motor nerve of the perineum, which innervates genital sensation and controls the urethral sphincter and anal sphincter (Wang et al., 2023).

Local Pelvic Floor Acupuncture / Myofascial Needling—Muscle Specific Ashi Point Needling to the pelvic floor muscles including: the levator ani (puborectalis, pubococcygeus, iliococcygeus), transverse perineal, ischiocavernosus and bulbospongiosus can address the myofascial component of CPP including muscle tightness, weakness, and recruitment. Addressing the concomitant structures including the muscles of the back, abdomen, gluteals, and hips can be vital to correcting biomechanics imbalances. When needling the pelvic floor, specialized training is highly recommended as this type of needling goes beyond the scope of most acupuncture school curriculums.

TCM POINTS USED IN RESEARCH

Conception Vessel 3 (Utmost Middle), Mu of Bladder, Intersecting Point: SP, LV, KD—Regulates blood stasis, resolves damp, regulates the lower *jiao* for visceral pelvic pain.

Conception Vessel 4 (First Gate) Mu of Small Intestine, Intersecting Point: SP, LV, KD—Tonifies yin and yang, tonifies kidney yang, qi, *jing*, tonifies *yuan* qi, warms uterus, regulates the lower *jiao* for visceral pelvic pain.

Spleen 6 (3 Yin Crossing)—Invigorates and cools blood, Nourishes kidney yin, blood, used for gynecology and genital pain problems, supports the spleen to revolve dampness, supports blood formation, prolapse.

Stomach 36 (Leg 3 Mile) - He-Sea, Earth, Heavenly Star, Sea of Grain—tonifies spleen qi, command point for abdomen, tonifies qi, blood, *wei* and *yuan*.

These points are used to harmonize qi and blood and regulate the lower *jiao*, making them common choices in research studies.

PATTERN-SPECIFIC TREATMENT APPROACHES

Liver Qi Stagnation

Liver qi stagnation with chronic pelvic pain generally has a symptom profile that includes sharp, cramping or distending pain often accompanying high levels of stress and worsening with emotions. The pulse will have a wiry quality.

Liver 3 (Supreme Rushing)- Shu-Stream, Earth, Source Point. Tonifies liver blood, spreads liver qi, moves stagnation, tonification technique.

Liver 8 (Crooked Spring) - He Sea, Water Point
Tonifies liver yin and blood.

Blood Stasis

Blood Stasis with chronic pelvic pain is characterized by dull, fixed aching pain, often accompanied by a heavy sensation, the classic dark clotted menses, and sometimes venous varicosities in the pelvis and legs. The tongue and the sublingual veins are typically dark purple.

Spleen 10 (Sea of Blood)

Moves stagnation of blood, cools blood, keeps the blood in the vessels, reducing technique.

Bladder 17 (Diaphragm Shu) Influential Point of Blood
Regulates blood, add BL19 to tonify qi and blood of whole body: "Four Flowers." Could consider BL18, BL20 to tonify qi and blood with moxa "Magnificent 6").

Kidney Deficiency

Kidney yin and yang deficiency can be present with CPP independently or existing concomitantly. Kidney yin deficiency through the lens of CPP is marked by heat symptoms such as night sweats and hot flushes, pelvic discomfort, often a dull ache, especially at night, burning in the lower *jiao*, insomnia, fatigue, and low libido. The tongue is often red.

Kidney yang deficiency and CPP present as cold symptoms

such as cool limbs, difficulty getting warm, back pain and pelvic pain relieved by heat, urinary bladder frequency, urgency, and incontinence. The tongue is pale and the pulse is weak.

Kidney 3 (Greater Mountain Stream) - Source Point
Tonifies kidney yang, qi, yin, essence, regulates uterus.

Kidney 6 (Illuminated Sea) - Confluence Point of Yin Qiao
Nourishes kidney yin, tonification technique (could add HT 6 to nourish both KI and HT yin together).

Kidney 7 (Returning Current) - Jing-River, Metal
Tonifies kidney yang, strengthens *jing*

Conception Vessel 7 (Yin Intersection)
Intersection of Chong, CV and Kidney, balances uterus and menstrual flow

Bladder 23 (Kidney Shu)
Tonifies the kidney yin, supports all yin organs, useful for back pain

Bladder 52 (Will Chamber)
Reinforces kidney *shu*, tonifies kidney yin, supports the kidney on spiritual emotional level, supports fertility

Governing Vessel 3 (Loins Yang Border)
Warms cold in the lower burner, tonify kidney yin

Governing Vessel 4 - Gate of Life
Warms the *mingmen*, tonifies kidney yang, benefits essence, warms uterus, add moxa

MENSTRUAL CYCLE CONSIDERATIONS

Regulating the menstrual cycle is one of the most important aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine and can guide treatment point selection and herbal remedies for CPP. The 4 phases of the cycle according to TCM:

Phase 1: Menstruation— Invigorate the blood to move stasis

Phase 2: Post Menstrual—Strengthen the kidneys, nourish the blood

Phase 3: Midcycle / Ovulation—Tonify the Kidneys, Strengthen Chong and Ren, tonify spleen, resolve damp and phlegm

Phase 4: Premenstrual—Move qi, warm the uterus, invigorate blood, tonify yang (Maciocia, 2020)

Utilizing cyclical principles allows treatment to align with the dynamic physiology of the menstrual cycle and the shifting balance of qi, blood, yin, and yang. From this perspective, sacral electroacupuncture may be most appropriate during the premenstrual phase (Phase 4), when Liver qi stagnation and yang deficiency patterns are more prominent, while local pelvic floor acupuncture and myofascial needling may be best emphasized during the postmenstrual phase (Phase 2), when nourishing blood and yin supports tissue recovery and neuromuscular balance. Both approaches may be judiciously applied during mid-cycle (Phase 3) as indicated. During menstruation (Phase 1),

treatment should be approached with caution and clear intention, prioritizing gentle blood movement and pain relief while avoiding excessive stimulation.

CONCLUSION

Chronic Pelvic Pain is a complex, multifactorial condition that extends beyond organ pathology. Its high prevalence, substantial economic burden, and profound impact on quality of life emphasize the need for comprehensive, patient-centered, informed care, and multidisciplinary approaches to health care. Conventional medical management alone often falls short in addressing the neuromuscular, neuroimmune, and psychosocial dimensions of CPP.

Acupuncture is a valuable and evidence-supported therapeutic modality that can support clients with CPP. Through mechanisms including neuromodulation, improved local circulation, regulation of pelvic floor muscle tone, and modulation of central sensitization, acupuncture addresses both peripheral and central aspects of pain. Techniques such as sacral electroacupuncture, local pelvic floor and concomitant myofascial needling, and pattern-based point selection grounded in Traditional Chinese Medicine provide acupuncturists with tools to meet the individualized needs of patients with CPP.

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Maciocia, personal class notes, Gynecology Seminar, 2020

Krystal Lynn Couture, DPT, LAc, founder of *The Pelvic Acu*, is an acupuncturist and physical therapist specializing in Pelvic Health. As a pelvic care acupuncturist, she brings to her practice a background steeped in both biomedical and holistic knowledge. She has an extensive formal background, with a Doctorate in physical therapy from Husson University as well as a Master of

Science in acupuncture from the Institute of Taoist Education and Acupuncture.

Dr. Krystal has been published in Acupuncture Today and Medicinal Roots Magazine. She's been featured on Michelle Grasek's Acupuncture Marketing School Podcast, Qiological, The American Acupuncture Council, Hofstra Radio and Dao Labs.

Krystal teaches Pelvic Care to Acupuncturists around the globe!

Herbal Formulas for Specific Patterns of Chronic Pelvic Pain*

Liver Qi Stagnation: Tang Kuei & Salvia Formula (*Jia Wei Si Wu Tang*) or Immortal Valley Formula (*Xian Gu Fang*)

Blood Stasis: Cinnamon & Poria Formula (*Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan*) or San Leng Dan Shen Formula (*San Leng Dan Shen Tang*)

Kidney Yin Deficiency: Yin Valley Formula (*Yin Gu Fang*) or Rehmannia & Scrophularia Formula (*Zhi Bai Di Huang Wan*)

Kidney Yang Deficiency: Essential Yang Formula (*Jia Jian Jin Gui Shen Qi Wan*)

Combined Deficiency of Kidney Yin and Kidney Yang: Restorative Formula (*Yang Xue Zhuang Jin Jian Bu Wan*)

FOR THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Phase 1 (Menstruation): Nourish Ren and Chong Formula (*Zi Jing Di Huang Wan*)

Phase 2 Cycle (Post Menstruation): Yuan Support Formula (*Jia Wei Jian Gu Tang*)

Phase 3 Cycle (Ovulation): Mobilize Essence Formula (*Fu Ren Bu Yin Pian*)

Phase 4 Cycle (Premenstrual): Chong Release Formula (*Jia Wei Tao Hong Si Wu Tang*)

* These formula recommendations were added by Golden Flower Chinese Herbs and are not part of the author's original article.





Spring: A Seasoned Surfer's Guide

By Peter Firebrace

THE SIX SOLAR PERIODS OF SPRING

With the six fifteen-day solar periods, what a six-fold run of cards we have in spring, a straight flush to start the year!

Li chun 立春 **the Start of Spring on February 3rd**

opened the race as we pass the mid-point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, between the deep mid-winter Return of Yang—hexagram 24 *fu* 復—and its powerful midspring showing in Great Strength—hexagram 34 *da zhuang* 大壯. Ready or not, here I come! Spring weather or not, I am here in the change of light and the growing length of day and it is light that changes everything.

This time of transition was known as *Imbolc* to the Celts, another culture, another time, but still marking one of the eight traditional festivals of their turning year, as do the *ba jie* 八節 eight nodes for the Chinese. Another language, another tradition, another location, but the same times marked as the eight key transition points of the year, that allow it to move, transform and change. For the Chinese, spring was the first season, out of which the others appeared. For Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, spring was the only season in his mythical Golden Age. Vivaldi starts his *Four Seasons* with Spring. No one wants a silent spring.

Yu shui 雨水 **Rain Water on February 18th** brought the reviving liquid that lets life grow, unfolding from deep within the dead dried old year husks. Without water, our fields and forests are nothing, no renewal possible, just as the spring organ of the liver is nothing without the rich liquid of blood that backs its breakthrough power and grounds the floating dream life of the *hun* 魂.

Jing zhe 驚蟄 **Awakening of Insects on March 5th**

cracked the sleeping spell of hibernation, awakens from the rigid ice lines of winter, releasing new life from stiffness and frozen immobility. How similar to the liver's potent breakout from stagnation and obstruction, the image of release.

Chun fen 春分 **Spring Equinox on March 20th** brought the perfect balance of yin-yang as equal day and night, then the yang takes the lead in seamless integration and co-merging creativity. From this comes Great Strength *da zhuang* 大

壯—hexagram 34—an image also of the forceful liver and its runaway wood power that can need the restraint and limitation of metal to prevent its abuse. At Ritan 日壇 the Sun Temple in the east of Beijing, the sun was worshipped by emperors of Ming and Qing dynasties at the spring equinox. Built in 1530, it is now a park. Spring prayers were given with ancestral worship and a tomb-sweeping ceremony in the ancestral hall.

Qing ming 清明 **Clear and Bright on April 4th** combines the colourful joy of full bloom spring, so beautifully visible, audible, tastable, tangible, fragrant, its new life abundantly restored. Traditionally this is the day for the sweeping of the tombs and graves to clean up the houses of the dead and give an honoured celebration of their continued presence in apparent absence, a day for the ancestors. Interesting that the *hun* 魂, the spirit of the liver, is the out of body spirit that goes from dream to dream and, who knows, perhaps from life to life. The Double Third Day, 3/3, the third day of the third month on April 19th brings *shangsi jie* 上巳節 the Original Purification Festival, traditionally cleansing and washing off bad luck, impurities and disease in river bathing. Other cultures are also cleansing and fasting around this time of year, such as the lean season of Lent before Easter.

Gu yu 穀雨 **Grain Rain on April 20th** brings spring's last life-giving heavy rainfall and raised temperatures so important for plant growth, particularly in the grains, the rice, the tea and the cotton. Agriculture is nothing without spring.

From barrenness and ice to perfect *gu yu* tea, from Plain Jane wintry landscapes to the beauty and abundance of flowers and the full-on sight of fields and fields of growing grain. Emerging from winter, spring is the restoration of life in all its glory, a perfect preparation for the heat and radiance of summer.

IN TUNE WITH THE SEASON

The *Neijing Suwen* chapter 2, the Great Treatise on Attuning your Spirit to the Qi of the Four Seasons (*si qi tiao shen da lun* 四氣調神大論), gives us good advice on how to act in spring, keeping the liver in tune with the season:

At night one goes to bed, at dawn one gets up. One paces in the courtyard with great strides, hair loose, body at ease, exerting the will for life. Letting live, not killing. Giving, not taking away. Rewarding, not punishing. This corresponds with the spring qi. It is the way that maintains the drive of life.

Active in the day, resting at night. Exercise outside, relaxed, but extended and strong. Be generous, considerate, positive. Be like the spring that gives everything while asking for nothing. The liver, so engaged in strategy and planning, too often for oneself alone, needs this expansion of vision to be part of life, not on top of life. The liver, the organ of sex and violence, of power play, of military means, of forceful conquest needs these simple, telling words: Letting live, not killing. Giving, not taking away. Rewarding, not punishing.

SPRING NEEDLING

Spring is related to the wood element and the liver and gallbladder are the two wood organs, related to heavenly stems *jia* 甲 and *yi* 乙, stems 1 and 2. Spring with its budding, shooting, opening qualities, bringing the hidden to life, expressing its inherent nature, finds natural partners in the liver and gallbladder and is therefore, a good time to use for their treatment. The *Neijing Suwen* chapter 2 mentions the liver for spring, the heart for summer, the lungs for autumn and the kidneys for winter, emphasizing the yin organs. So, remembering the liver and gallbladder are active in springtime is an important first step in seasonal treatments. They respond quicker, react faster, are easier to affect. So, yes, all your stuck, obstructed, frustrated patients can change more easily with the help of spring itself. Spring is your treatment partner, use it! A point such as Liv 13 (Gate of Perfection) *zhang men* 章門 addresses *jia ju* 瘕聚 accumulations and knots, various growths, masses, and hard swellings, often in the abdominal area or the breast. Using this point in the liver's own time of spring will help its ability to transform accumulations and blockages. Similarly, a point such as GB 21 (Shoulder Well) *jian jing*, that can unfreeze frozen shoulders and move locked pain in the upper back and shoulders, will be more beneficial to use in the spring, the season where everything is unlocked and freed.

While there are more than half a dozen texts on what to needle in each season, with different models being presented in different chapters, the points particularly associated with the season of spring are *ying* 營 spring points in *Neijing Lingshu* 44 and *Lingshu* 2 and, *jing* 井 well points in *Nanjing* 74.

Ying 營 spring or brook points are where the qi gushes forth or flows *liu* 溜. They are fire on the yin meridians, water on the yang, and are used to clear heat, including heat from deficiency of yin or blood. They can also nourish yin and blood. Many are located where the skin changes colour. Interestingly, *Lingshu* 44 says to use them in spring when the disease changes colour (e.g., the complexion). Some take this to indicate heat. From the spring equinox onwards the host climate in spring is given as heat, so this could partly explain the use of these points in spring.

Two examples to illustrate: Liv 2 (Moving Between) *xing jian* 行間 is a key point to clear heat and reduce liver fire and also for liver blood deficiency leading to heat. In both cases, the complexion would change colour with the heat. LU 10 (Fish Border) *yu ji* 魚際 clears lung heat either from excess or deficiency with pain, swelling and congestion of the throat.

Jing 井 well points are where the qi emerges or appears *chu* 出. Wood on the yin meridians and metal on the yang, the *jing*-well points clear heat, drain excess, dispel stagnation, and restore consciousness. At the tips of the fingers and toes, they are the change from yin to yang on the hands and from yang to yin on the feet. They affect especially the op-

posite end of the meridian, the chest on the yin meridians and the head on the yang.

The *Nanjing* 74 says to use them in springtime only if the pathogens reside in the liver. This indicates that the spring organ of the liver has been affected, which may well give symptoms of excess or stagnation, such as headaches, dizziness, pain and itching. My wife uses a toothpick or small ear magnets to stimulate the *jing*-well points, rather than an acupuncture needle, to minimize pain.

An example to illustrate: Liv 1 (Large Mound) *da dun* 大敦 is effective for irregular menstruation, pain in the lower abdomen and uterine bleeding.

**THE THREE LUNAR MONTHS OF SPRING**

The Chinese calendar is a sol-lunar calendar, so the lunar months, the phases of the moon and the transitions between one moon and another are of great importance. Chinese New Year, which the Chinese themselves refer to as *chun jie* 春節 Spring Festival, is always the second new moon after the winter solstice, which to them is the *zheng yue* 正月, the correct month, the first month. It is the biggest of all their festivals, lasting at least three days, an important time of family and community reunion and a real start to another year in a blaze of fireworks to keep away negative influences. In 2026, this was February 17th, when the year changes from the stem 2 branch 6 乙巳 *yi si* Wood Snake of 2025 to stem 3 branch 7 丙午 *bing wu* Fire Horse of 2026. Here the double fire of a fire stem and fire branch can give brightness and clarity, unless it is excessive, in which case it will burn and destroy with excessive heat. This image is altered by the Five Periods, 6 Qi system *wu yun liu qi* 五運六氣 which says a *bing* 丙 year is a year of abundant water, which will cool the fire. So, there may in reality be alternation of cold and heat in this year.

As it is a new moon, the 12th month stem 6 branch 2 己丑 *ji chou* Earth Ox month changes to 1st month stem 7 branch 3 庚寅 *geng yin* Metal Tiger month. We would

expect the natural Wood spring energy of the Tiger to be restrained and cut back by the metal stem. Importantly for medicine these lunar months are related to the 12 branches and their associated meridians, just as for a day they are related to the 12 double hours of the so-called 'Chinese clock'. So here, just as in the day branch 3 yin 寅 time 03:00 to 05:00 is related to the lungs and starts the meridian circulation for the day, so branch 3 yin month relates to the first lunar month, so February 17th started the month of the lungs, when the lungs are active, more influenced and more influential to use for treatment. This is for the duration of the first lunar month, which ended on March 19th.

Importantly then we have already seen that the liver is the organ active in the spring, which extends from February 3rd, Start of Spring *li chun* 立春 to May 5th, Start of Summer *li xia* 立夏. And we have the lung meridian active in the first lunar month from February 17th to March 19th 2026, the large intestine meridian active in the second lunar month from March 19th to April 17th and the stomach meridian active in the third lunar month from April 17th to May 16th. There is of course much more to consider in a full assessment of the multiple aspects acting in any particular time of year, especially the effect of host and guest climates and the matching meridians allied to each month, which will not be discussed here. The interaction between the seasonal organ and the monthly circulating meridian is crucial and a key feature of using timing to benefit treatment, helping to align one's treatments with the time of year, thereby using the qi that is active like a seasoned surfer waiting for the wave.

The first lunar month starts at the Chinese New Year with 3rd earthly branch yin 寅, wood element, and the hand tai yin lung meridian is active. Since the traditional host climate is jue yin wind from January 20th to March 20th, both lungs and liver must be protected from wind invasion with such points as BL 12 Wind Gate *feng men* 風門 for the lungs and GB 20 Wind Pool *feng chi* 風池 for the liver. Lu 3 (Heavenly Storehouse) *tian fu* 天府 is a particular point for liver insulting the lungs, causing spasmodic coughing, breathlessness and nosebleed. Lu 9 (Great Abyss) *tai yuan* 太淵 is helpful in exhaustion, deficiency, and sadness, common in the February blues of early spring. We should remember liver and lung meridians are neighbours as first and last meridians and their wood-metal dynamic is not necessarily opposite, but complementary.

In the second lunar month the hand yangming large intestine meridian is active, which is important for raising yang to the head, particularly around the teeth and the mouth, which are essential for good digestion. And while stomach and spleen points may be more important than large intestine points to help with bowel problems, we should remember that multi-functional points such as LI 4 (Joining Valley) *he gu* 合谷 and LI 11 (Pool at the Bend) *qu chi* 曲池 do include such actions. Such points can then be

used to help the cleansing and clearing aspect of spring, the spring-cleaning of the digestive system and restoration of the liver. The ancient alliance of the four gates, Liv 3 Great (Rushing) *tai chong* 太衝 and LI 4 (Joining Valley) *he gu* 合谷 is also an excellent combination to use at this time of year for painful obstruction that is often worse with cold, wind, and damp that can be common in early spring. Both *yuan*-source points and key points for the arms and legs, the qi can flow again and pains diminish. The second month relates to the 4th earthly branch *mao* 卯, wood element, an open door to let the yang flow in, perfect for the spring equinox that does just that. The host climate changes from *jueyin* wind to *shaoyin* heat on March 20th, so the cooling point of LI 11 (Pool at the Bend) *qu chi* 曲池 can be of particular importance to reduce heat.

The third lunar month relates to the 5th earthly branch *chen* 辰, the element earth, and the stomach is active. Both earth and the stomach are extremely helpful to ground and support the liver, especially in this abundant time of late spring, so many points can be useful here. St 25 (Heavenly Pivot) *tian shu* 天樞, St 37 (Upper Great Void) *shang ju xu* 上巨虛 and St 39 (Lower Great Void) *xia ju xu* 下巨虛 improve digestion by working on the intestines. St 21 (Beam Gate) *liang men* 梁門, St 22 (Pass Gate) *guan men* 關門 and St 24 (Slippery Flesh Gate) *hua rou men* 滑肉門 are all three *men* 門 gate points to open and harmonize the middle heater and produce rich blood for the liver. St 28 (Water Way) *shui dao* 水道, St 29 (Return) *gui lai* 歸來 and St 30 (Rushing Qi) *qi chong* 氣衝 work on blood, fluids and the *chong mai* 衝脈 for menstrual and fertility problems, particularly with key points such as Liv 3 (Great Rushing) *tai chong* 太衝.

Spring gladdens everyone's hearts with its beauty and certain restoration of life. And if we are spring in ourselves, we can be part of that renewal process and that generosity, strength, and power will be in our own lives, improving our health and the health of those we treat. Our liver qi and blood will thrive: good for us, wonderful for everyone else too! Making the best use of time includes timing, letting the wave take you without effort—then time becomes timeless.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Acupuncturist, teacher and writer, Peter Firebrace has been studying Chinese medicine for 40 years, with a particular interest in the Chinese classics, both medical and philosophical. Their keen observation of time as an ongoing expression of yin yang dynamics helps us understand both how to use time in treatment and how to become more in tune with time ourselves. With his wife Kathaline, he has set up Guan Academy of Chinese Medicine to share courses, articles and recordings, such as Time, Timing and the Timeless. www.guanacademy.com.



Golden Flower Chinese Herbs Formula Name Changes

After 30 years, the FDA informed us that some of our formula names needed to be changed. These formulas are listed below. There is no change to ingredients or percentiles.

These changes will happen gradually as new batches come out of production.

Current Formula Name	New Formula Name
Amber Stone-Transforming Formula	Amber Formula
Chase Wind Penetrate Bone Formula	Chase Wind Formula
Children's Clear Lung Formula	Children's Lung Support Formula
Children's Clear & Release Formula	Children's Gan Mao Formula
Children's Jade Defense Formula	Children's Immune Support Formula
Coptis Relieve Toxicity Formula	Coptis Formula
Head Relief Formula	Gao Ben Bai Zhi Formula
Intestinal Fungus Formula	Pulsatilla & Coptis Formula
Neck Formula	Angelica & Kudzu Formula
Phlegm-Transforming Formula	Prunella Formula
Pulsatilla Intestinal Formula	Pulsatilla Formula
Restore The Lung Formula	Bu Fei Formula
Stasis-Transforming Formula	San Leng Dan Shen Formula
Trauma 1 Formula	Warrior's Support 1 Formula
Trauma 2 Formula	Warrior's Support 2 Formula

Golden Flower Chinese Herbs Proudly Carries These Great Products:



To save resources, the Golden Flower newsletter is now available digital format only. New issues will be emailed to you in the Spring and Fall. If you are not on our email list, please send your name and email address to info@gfcherbs.com with "Newsletter" in the subject line. Or register on our website at www.gfcherbs.com. Golden Flower account holders have access to all new and back issues of our newsletters, monographs, published papers, as well as information about all of our formulas and products.

EVEN STUBBORN SIBO CAN YIELD: A DIETARY APPROACH FROM WITHIN CHINESE MEDICINE

By Andrew Serman

Modern digestive problems may not have been known to the originating masters of classical Chinese medicine, but the therapeutic principles from the tradition are needed more than ever to handle stubborn conditions such as what is known as SIBO. More a syndrome than a disease with a single causative factor, small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) is a label given symptoms of bloating after meals, gassiness, pain and cramps, disorganized bowels, possibly lethargy, fatigue, frustration, and unwanted weight gain or loss. Sometimes there are lab tests, other times diagnosis is based on symptoms. Either way, SIBO is not a well-defined illness with identified disease agents. It's a syndrome, a health rut that we can fall into due to a combination of causes. Simply adopting a "good diet" is not enough to lift us out of this condition, in fact we can't eat that diet, yet. The therapy needs to be strong enough and well-informed enough to get us up and out of that ditch.

Since the name includes the term "bacteria," treatment with antibiotics is common, yet rarely effective. A better name would be SIMO, small intestinal microbial overgrowth, since yeasts and other microbial agents are involved. Whatever we call it, successful treatment must be whole-body-whole-life treatment and not an outdated "find the germs and kill them" approach. SIBO is a set of conditions where either unhealthy microbes are proliferating in the small intestine, or healthy microbes are colonizing too high in the intestines, out of their normal terrain. The result is fermentation of foods, especially sugars, rather than organized digestion of those foods. This internal fermentation causes gassy bloating and pain while the poor digestion reduces energy levels. To be simple, SIBO can be a condition of "bad players" in the intestinal tract or "good players in wrong places".

That's where we may find ourselves, but what are the actual causes? In a survey of various medical websites responding to trending interest, SIBO is explained as a result of:

- low stomach acid
- slowed gut motility
- and "mysterious reasons" including genetic abnormalities, unhappy results from abdominal surgery, and perhaps some unforeseen side effects from pharmaceuticals.

In my clinical experience this is partly correct and partly absurd. What is missing is that SIBO is nearly always associated with heavy use of some very commonly used medicines. Most individuals suffering from SIBO have long histories with antibiotics, or drugs for acid-reflux, from over-the-counter antacids to prescription proton pump inhibitors. Other drugs that can be involved are weight-loss drugs as well as the use of ayahuasca or opioids. To translate modern terminology into more classical Chinese medicine language and include the causative prevalence of even properly prescribed medications, we can look at the causes of SIBO generally as the following:

- microbiome damage due primarily to heavy use of antibiotics, secondarily to acid-reflux medications, followed by other drugs that negatively impact digestion.
- low stomach fire, or "low stomach acid."
- food stagnation, or "reduced gut motility."

Seen in Chinese medicine terms, we can now see what basic functions of qi and fluids are involved, and then design personal dietary plans for each individual, based on their specific symptoms, stage of difficulty, strengths and weaknesses, and practical food preferences. Overall, check for spleen-pancreas weakness, for stomach fire status, and whether there is liver-gallbladder involvement yet. Kidney yang qi is important if lethargy is present, lung qi is crucial, as the *wei* qi for peristalsis is directed by lungs (and liver). Emotions are always important, particularly as the digestive organs relate directly to mentation and emotions such as worry. Since all emotions affect the heart, we can see that SIBO is a full-being scenario and must be treated as such.

With this in mind, let's look at several typical etiologies for the development of SIBO.

EXAMPLE 1: SORE THROAT WITH ANTIBIOTICS

A person gets sick, antibiotics are used, the infection seems to clear but their healthy microbiome is decimated in the process. The original issue may have been sore throat, but antibiotics act globally in the body, destroying healthy microbes of the gut microbiome. This applies to other applications of antibiotics as well, for example, with urinary tract infections. Antibiotics may sometimes be necessary—that is not the discussion here—but their repeated use leaves the microbiome in disarray, vulnerable to negative colonization, especially if sugar is common in the diet.

EXAMPLE 2: ACID REFLUX

An individual eats a standard modern diet filled with processed food-stuffs. Or, there is long-term stress, history of trauma, or sudden life-stress, and digestion slows to a crawl. We then reject part of our reality, wishing to "send it back," which sometimes somaticizes as an "upset" stomach (notice the "up.") This turns the healthy descending directionality of stomach qi into reversal or rebellion, slowing downward digestive movement, weakening the appetite and eventually causing "acid reflux." This is too often treated with common or prescription antacids. Tums, Roloids, or other over-the-counter antacids were reported as a three billion dollar business in the United States alone for 2025, and the prescription PPI (proton pump inhibitor) business was reported to be nearly four billion dollars in the same year. Stomach acid rising up is mistakenly treated by trying to reduce the amount of stomach acid, rather than restoring the natural downward directionality of digestion. The steady use of antacids or PPI can eventually result in excessively low stomach acid, which is one of the key findings in SIBO patients. And indeed, over-the-counter medications to repair low stomach acid reached over 600 million dollars of business in 2024.

EXAMPLE 3, FOOD STAGNATION WITH CONSTIPATION

An individual is busy, skips breakfast, eats too much later, is out of rhythm for meals and peristalsis. There are many possible causes for food stagnation, including fatigue, poor food combinations, processed foods, excess sticky foods such as sweets, gluten, or dairy, frustration, sadness or lingering grief, or any kind of weakness of the lungs.

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Considering all this, we can see an emerging cycle of disorganized microbiome, food stagnation, low stomach fire, and fatigue, mixed with stress that weakens immunity, allowing wind-cold invasion (common cold, flu, etc.), which may invite the use of more antibiotics, which further weakens the microbiome, motility, digestive fire, and sustained immune integrity, which leads to further vulnerability....

And now the stage is well set for the stubborn dysbiosis that eventually gets labeled SIBO.

The overall strategy is to:

- Reduce or eliminate causative factors (unnecessary medications and foods that are stagnating or sticky, especially in poor combination.)
- Adding foods with specific dietary energetics.
- Carefully following progress, adjusting diet as needed in real time.
- The specific treatment strategies are to:
 - Restore and regulate stomach fire.
 - Clear food stagnation and restore gut motility.
 - Strengthen digestion from *zang fu* energetics perspective (strengthen spleen-pancreas yang qi, relax liver and gallbladder, descend and anchor lung qi, warm kidney yang qi, etc.)
- Rebuild the microbiome.

There is no unified version of SIBO, as we know from comparing dramatically varying tongue presentations of patients who arrive with the same diagnostic label. Our treatment must be guided by the following Chinese medicine principles and observations:

- Is there heat, showing as redness in specific areas of the tongue or rapid pulses?
- Is the tongue showing a blue or sunken center, indicating cold or lack of stomach fire in digestion?
- Is the tongue showing qi deficiency through a limp or flaccid presentation?
- Is the tongue showing lumpy or clumping areas, indicating stagnation?
- Are there signs in the pulse of weak lung qi descension, cold in the kidneys perhaps from trauma, or a lack of transport between the three jiao/burners?

We must make dietary recommendations that the individual with weakened digestion can manage and that will gradually lead to restoration of stomach fire, gut motility, restored spleen-pancreas yang qi, and release of liver or gallbladder constraint.

When making dietary recommendations, ask what foods the patient can eat, as this is often surprising. Then, have them keep a simple journal of what meals do work for them; in other words, no matter how basic, they list what can they eat that does not cause bloating and pain, recorded for each meal. These safe meals may need to be only broth or steamed chicken, but there will be something that works. It must be noted down. This is the starting place. Together, we then build up to ten safe meals that are reliably accepted by digestion without symptoms.

At that point, we can begin restoring stomach fire with the use of:

- Soup appetizers that are wet, easy to digest, and warm the stomach. Chicken broth or chicken soup may work well, as they are energetically strongly warming.
- The use of crunchy foods: warmed carrots, celery, water chestnuts, etc..
- Seed spices to scatter cold from the stomach and raise healthy stomach fire: cumin, cardamom, cinnamon, clove, fennel seed, Szechuan peppercorn, etc.
- Green leafy kitchen herbs that gently stimulate digestion: rosemary, fresh dill, oregano, thyme, basil, sage, etc.
- Cooked sprouts to aid digestion.

To work with food stagnation, we would normally include whole grains such as oats or Himalayan red rice, but grains can be problematic for many with SIBO as the carbs permit blooming of the “sugar eaters”. Note that SIBO is never caused by grains, but rather by a combination of antibiotics and sugar-heavy diets, but when the condition is in full form, grains need to be eaten very carefully, if at all (at first). Since grains may not work well, restore descending digestive energetics with the bitter greens, root vegetables, and seeds:

- Broccoli rabe, dandelion greens, endive, radicchio, chicory, escarole, bitter melon, artichoke, olives, etc.
- Carrot, daikon, parsnip, burdock root, etc.
- Pumpkin seeds are descending and can be used to clear the idea of parasites.
- The use of citrus peel and sour umeboshi plum paste to calm digestion.

Spiced teas, for example Masala Chai (with or without dairy) can be excellent to replace snacks and stimulate healthy stomach fire (see recipe below).

Fermented foods can help restore a healthy microbiome, but their use is an art. Many with SIBO can't tolerate anything fermented (“my belly becomes a beer factory!”) but when things improve, fermented or cultured foods become very important in rebuilding the microbiome.

- Yogurt, kefir (with living culture)
- Kombucha, kvass
- Naturally made pickles, sauerkraut, kimchi, and Szechuan pickled vegetables.
- Note: avoid garlic and too much spice in these fermented foods.

Throughout the healing process, to resolve SIBO there must be strict avoidance of sugar or sweet foods, including hidden sugar, fruit, or highly refined foods. For many people looking to gradually improve overall health, some dietary cheating doesn't hurt much, but with SIBO, the benefits of two weeks with zero sugar can be completely lost to a momentary indulgence. The “sugar eater” microbes will have an immediate population bloom and all that work will be lost. This condition requires clear and unwavering dietary change.

Gradually introducing healthy fiber foods is essential when the timing is right:

- Sweet potato, carrot ginger soup, millet, brown rice, buckwheat, red lentils, then brown lentils.
- Cook with herbs and spices that aid the digestion of the foods themselves, for example, lentils cooked with cumin, cardamom, dill, olive oil, and sea salt.
- Use the counting method with high-fiber foods such as tiger nuts (an ancient Mediterranean mini-legume sold as a healthy snack food.) Note in your book that you have had one tiger nut today, one tomorrow, and so forth, raising your number to two per day next week. The increased fiber feeds the healthy microbes lower in the intestinal tract, while the strict counting method avoids a sudden introduction of fiber that could cause terrible pain if eaten before the microbiome is ready for it.
- Apply the axiom: you have the microbiome you feed.

And of course, drinking water is essential. Each day should begin with one or two full glasses of warm, clean water.

This is the basic strategy, to be customized for each patient based on real-time assessment of tongue, pulse, history, and their progress. Below are some recipe suggestions that can be given to patients based on their specifics. There is no question that health can return if good advice is applied with focus and perseverance.

MUSHROOM KOMBU BROTH WITH CELLOPHANE NOODLES, BEAN SPROUTS, SNOW PEAS, TANGERINE PEEL, SEA SALT

kombu | 1 strip
 dried black mushrooms | 6-8
 leek | 1 medium white parts only
 carrots | 3 medium
 celery | 2 stalks
 parsley or cilantro | half a bunch
 tangerine peel | 1 stamp-size piece per person, soaked, slivered
 other herbs | optional; see below
 toasted sesame oil | 1 tbs
 dried cellophane noodles | 2 handfuls
 snow peas | two handfuls, trimmed, sliced
 mung bean sprouts | 1 ample handful
 salt | to taste

Trim the leek, cut in half, rinse thoroughly, cut into half-rings. Add to a large pot, with a splash of the cooking oil.

Rehydrate the dried cellophane noodles (Asian shop ingredient) in a bowl of warm water. Drain, rinse with cool water, set aside.

Wash, trim and chop the carrots and celery, add to the pot, stir. After about 5 minutes, add the kombu strip (kombu is a dried seaweed of the kelp family used for soups and broths) and the dried mushrooms. Fresh mushrooms or a combination will also do, but the dried contribute special depth of flavor and color.

Add the water and herbs (if desired). I vary the herbs, sometimes using European notes such as tarragon, sage or thyme, sometimes

I use seeds spices like star anise, fenugreek, peppercorns or mustard seed, and sometimes Chinatown herbs that overlap medicine and kitchen use such as jujube, *bai zhu*, *huang qi*, and *dang gui*. Spices and herbs fine tune the broth; follow your own feelings.

Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cook for 15 minutes. Add the snow peas (whole or sliced), the parsley, the slivered citrus peel, and the bean sprouts. Cellophane noodles are extremely gentle on digestion and provide a satisfying feeling to chew without weighing down the soup. Add the soften cellophane noodles just long enough to warm up, or, add room-temperature soaked cellophane noodles into each bowl and allow the hot soup to warm them enough. Add toasted sesame oil and salt to taste. Serve steaming.

Add or eliminate ingredients depending upon how you are feeling. If bloating is severe, have more broth and less of the vegetables. If appetite is good have more solids.

ODEN THIN STEW

kombu | 1 piece
 dried black mushrooms | 8 medium-size
 daikon | 1 medium-size, washed and cut into 1-inch chunks
 carrot | 3 medium or large carrots, washed and cut into 1-inch chunks
 tofu (optional) | 1 pound block, cut into 1-inch chunks
 water | about 10-12 cups
 tamari | 1/2-1/3 cup
 sea salt | to taste
 toasted sesame oil | splash
 hard boiled egg (optional) | 1 per person

Place the kombu (seaweed for stock) and the dried black mushrooms in a pot with 10-12 cups cool water (just under 3 liters). Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer. After 10-15 minutes, remove the kombu (it can be sliced and used in stir-fry or sauté dishes) and the black mushrooms (they can be cooled, sliced, and used in other dishes, but discard the stems which never fully soften).

Add the tamari and mirin (or sake). Reserve the toasted sesame oil until later.

Wash, trim, and cut the daikon and carrots into 1-inch chunks. Add to the pot.

Simmer for 30-60 minutes. Other greens and root vegetables can be added, if desired, such as celery, snow peas, bok choy, Chinese (Napa) cabbage, sweet potato, or others (add long-cooking vegetables earlier, shorter ones like snow peas shortly before serving).

If using tofu, add for the last 5 minutes before serving, just enough to warm through. Taste and adjust for salt; add the splash of toasted sesame oil as serving each bowl.

Oden is a thin stew, the broth is aromatic, translucent, and deeply soothing.

Serve with steamed rice and greens for a complete meal.

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MILLET, STEAMED KALE, WHITE FISH, FRESH LEMON, PARSLEY

Rinse, dry-roast, steam ¼ cup millet per person (recipe is in Welcoming Food book 2).

Rinse, pull kale off its ribs, chop into bite size, steam until bright green, about 5 minutes. Drain water, coat with a nice olive oil and chef's pinch of good salt.

Add fresh white fish fillet (flounder, sole, trout, sea bass, etc.) to a pan with butter or olive oil. Add a tablespoon water, cover. Steam until just barely flakey. Add chopped parsley and juice of ¼ fresh lemon, salt to taste, fresh black pepper if stomach warming is needed.

HOW TO MAKE GOOD MASALA CHAI

(spiced tea to raise weak stomach fire)

Heat 2-3 cups good water in a pot.

Add the Essential Spices to the water as it warms:

whole cloves | 3-4

green cardamom | 3-4, crush slightly to open pods before adding fresh ginger | size of a small thumb, crushed with mortar/pestle

Bring the water to a boil.

Add the Optional Spices as desired:

whole black peppercorns | 2 tablespoons

cinnamon stick | 1

Do not add milk yet, as we don't want the milk to boil.

Once the water and spices have come to a full boil, it's time to reduce heat and add the tea. The quality of the Masala chai depends on the quality of the ingredients. Use filtered or spring water, good quality spices, and high quality tea. Loose leaf tea is nearly always best, but tea bags are acceptable. What is most important is to reduce the heat to a low simmer.

Add 2 heaping teaspoons loose leaf black tea, to the hot spiced water. Simmer at least 2-3 minutes. Don't rush, and don't overheat the tea. There are many types of tea; a good black tea of Ceylon type works best here. Simmer until the liquid is very dark in color. It should be strong, as we will be adding milk or dairy substitute to mellow the strength of the tea and spices.

Add the milk a bit at a time to the pot. This masala chai can be very good with dairy substitute (oat, almond, soy, macadamia "milks") Add the milk slowly, a small pour at a time, then another bit, judging the amount needed by color. Each batch is a bit different.

The rule of thumb is for the milk or dairy substitute to be at least one quarter the amount of water used, and not more than half. Warming the milk or dairy substitute before adding helps keep the Chai hot. Add enough to reach the perfectly deep color, like that of caramel.

Strain through a small sieve to serve into each cup.

CHANA DAL

(spiced yellow split peas or baby chickpeas)

cumin | 1 tsp (whole or ground)

turmeric | 1.5 tsp (ground)

cardamom | 1/2 tsp (ground)

clove | 1/4 tsp (ground, or 2-4 whole cloves)

bay leaf | 1

grapeseed oil | splash

chana dal (or other small bean) | 1 cup

water | 4 cups

sea salt | 1 tsp

cilantro (or parsley) | half a bunch

In a large pot, warm the cumin, turmeric, cardamom, clove, and bay leaf, then add a splash of oil, enough to lightly coat the spices. Allow the aromatics to develop over heat for just a minute or two, then add the raw dal. If you can't find the split small chickpeas known as chana dal, substitute yellow split peas, full size chickpeas, lentils, moong, or any small bean. Stir.

Add the water, bring to a boil, reduce to an active but gentle simmer. Cook for about 45 minutes, check for tenderness and fluid level, add water if needed, cook until tender yet not mushy.

Remove the bay leaf and add the salt.

Partially purée with an immersion blender, or in a standing blender (in batches). The dal should be like a thick soup with visible legumes among the purée; add more water if needed. Serve with fresh cilantro (or parsley) over grain, or in a small bowl next to other foods.

Each day can be different, so our eating must adjust dynamically. Cooking to climb out of SIBO takes time, knowledge, perseverance, and an artist's care. There are no set protocols to follow to the letter, but there are guidelines to support overcoming SIBO that make sense both to western and Chinese medical views. More importantly, the guidelines work well when applied consistently. As clinicians, we work with our clients on all aspects of mind and body.

When better digestion arrives, our relationship with food can relax, but wisely.

Andrew Serman is the author of Welcoming Food, Diet as Medicine for the Home Cook and Other Healers. The two-volume Welcoming Food offers a unique entry into understanding the energetics of food, explains how foods work in common sense language, and provides easy-to-follow recipes for everyday eating. Andrew teaches food energetics classes and sees private clients for dietary therapy and health qigong in New York City and online. Andrew is co-founder of All's Well Teas & Elixirs which offers non-medical health-supportive herbal teas. He has studied deeply in holistic cooking, meditation, and qigong, and for twenty-five years has been a student of Daoist Master Jeffrey Yuen in herbal medicine, qigong, and dietary therapy in the classical Chinese medicine tradition. Visit Andrew at welcoming-food.com to sign up for more recipes, the Instagram page, and more.