



KATIE BRINDLE

Chapped Lips Guide

Treatment techniques Rooted in Chinese Wisdom



Overview

Chapped lips, also known as lip dryness or Cheilitis, is a common condition characterised by dryness, cracking, flaking and soreness in the lip area, sometimes accompanied by slight inflammation and swelling in extreme cases. In Western medicine, this is often attributed to external factors such as exposure to harsh weather conditions (cold, wind, excessive sun), dehydration, allergic reaction, or habits such as frequent licking or picking of the lips. However, in Chinese Medicine this uncomfortable condition is viewed as a reflection of internal disharmonies and imbalances, primarily relating to Spleen, Lung and, to an extent, Large Intestine Qi, all of which play crucial roles in maintaining the health of the skin and muscles, including the lips. External pathogens, such as Wind, Heat, Dryness and Damp, also contribute to the manifestation of chapped lips, along with the influence of emotional stresses.

Causes

- **Wind-Heat:** The lips are particularly vulnerable to external pathogenic factors such as Wind and Heat. Wind is considered a Yang pathogen that moves rapidly and changes frequently, often carrying with it other pathogens such as Heat. When Wind-Heat invades the body, it can manifest as lip dryness and cracking, which can then be exacerbated by external conditions such as exposure to windy and hot environments, or internally through conditions that generate internal Heat.
- **Wind-Cold:** Exposure to Wind combined with Cold can also harm the lips. This is particularly relevant in cold climates or during the Winter months. Wind-Cold can constrict and stagnate the flow of Qi and blood to the lips, leading to dryness and chapping.

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- **Spleen Qi Deficiency:** Spleen Qi deficiency can fail to nourish the muscles and skin, leading to dryness. As the lips are considered an extension of the Spleen, this deficiency can manifest as chapped lips. An imbalanced Spleen may also result in the production of internal Dampness or Phlegm which, when combined with Heat, can aggravate the dryness, cracking and flaking experienced.
- **Yin Deficiency and Internal Dryness:** Chronic Yin deficiency can lead to a lack of cooling and moistening fluids in the body, resulting in internal dryness. This is often caused by factors such as prolonged illness, stress, insufficient rest, or poor dietary choices. The lips, being delicate and exposed, are particularly susceptible to this dryness.
- **Stomach Heat:** Excess Stomach Heat, often due to poor dietary habits, such as over consumption of hot, spicy, greasy and fried foods, or excessive alcohol or caffeine, can manifest externally on the lips. This is because the Stomach meridian passes through the mouth, so imbalances can have a direct impact on the lip area.
- **Lung Dryness:** The Lungs regulate body fluids and help to control the skin, so any dryness affecting the Lungs, whether due to external dry climates, smoking, or emotional upset, can lead to insufficient nourishment and hydration of the skin, including the skin of the lips.

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Organs Implicated

- Lungs: In Chinese Medicine, the Lungs are primarily responsible for governing Qi and, as such, help to control the skin and hair, playing a crucial role in dispersing and descending body fluids to moisturise the skin, including the lips. When affected by pathogens such as Wind or Dryness due to factors such as climate, smoking, or emotional disturbances such as grief or sadness, this can lead to a deficiency in nourishing and moisturising the skin, contributing to chapped, sore lips.
- Large Intestine: As the Yang pairing to the Yin Lungs, Large Intestine Qi is directly influenced by the strength of Lung Qi. Any disharmony or dysfunction, often as a result of emotional stress, can affect the moisture levels of the skin and lips. Additionally, the Large Intestine is responsible for waste elimination, including clearing Heat from the body. An imbalance in this meridian can, therefore, lead to toxin accumulation, which may manifest externally as skin issues, including the condition of the lips.
- Spleen: The Spleen is instrumental in the transformation and transportation of nutrients and body fluids, which helps to nourish the muscles and flesh, including the lips, by ensuring proper distribution of fluids and Qi. Spleen Qi deficiency, which can be worsened by factors such as poor dietary choices, overthinking, or prolonged worry, can lead to an inability to generate enough nourishment, resulting in dryness of the lips. Additionally, when the Spleen is weakened, it can lead to the accumulation of Damp-Phlegm, which, if combined with internal Heat, can manifest on the delicate lip area as swelling, redness, or increased chapping, due to a compromised ability to correctly manage fluids.
- Stomach: The Stomach is associated with the 'ripening and rotting' of food; its health is directly reflected on the lips, due to the Stomach meridian passing through the mouth. If there is excess Stomach Heat, often due to improper diet, this can manifest externally as dryness, cracking and flaking on the lips. Strong Stomach Qi is essential for robust digestive health and the overall nourishment and hydration of the body, including the lips, so imbalances will negatively impact the quality of nourishment reaching the skin, potentially causing issues in the lip area.

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Emotions

Chronic emotional stress can severely disrupt the flow of Qi in the body. Each organ has specific negative emotions attached to it which, if left unresolved, can manifest as physical problems:

- **Lungs - Grief and Sadness:** In Chinese Medicine, our Lungs are affected by the emotions of sadness, grief and loss. These negative emotions of the Lungs, when left to become chronic, can constrict Lung Qi, hindering its ability to disperse and descend fluids efficiently, which is essential in order for the skin, and by extension, the lips to be properly moisturised. It is this prolonged grief or unresolved sadness that can lead to a drying effect on the body, especially noticeable on sensitive areas such as the lips, causing them to become parched, chapped and sore.
- **Spleen - Worry and Overthinking:** The negative emotions of the Spleen are overthinking and worry. Excessive worry or mental rumination can weaken Spleen Qi, impairing effective transformation and transportation of nutrients and fluids throughout the body which can then lead to inadequate nourishment and moisture reaching the lips, resulting in dryness or chapping.
- **Large Intestine - Letting Go:** The Large Intestine is associated with the process of letting go, not just physically but also emotionally. Difficulty in releasing emotions, such as guilt, or holding onto the past in the form of unresolved emotional baggage or a sense of insecurity, can hinder the function of the Large Intestine, which can then impact the health of the lips due to the organ's close connection to the Lungs. The concept of "keeping a stiff upper lip," representing emotional restraint, illustrates this perfectly, as the Large Intestine meridian runs above the upper lip area and along the naso-labial grooves, potentially impacting the health of the lips and contributing to conditions such as chapped lips.

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Acupressure

Acupressure is a technique that can easily be performed as part of your self-care practices. Gentle pressure is applied to specific points on the body with fingers or an acupressure tool to help clear blockages in the meridians, the pathways of the body through which Qi flows.

LU-11 (Shàoshāng)

Location: Found at the outside corner of the thumb nail, level with the base of the nail.

Why: This point is at the end of the Lung meridian, which governs the skin, including the lips. Stimulating LU-11 is especially useful when there is noticeable dryness or Heat in the Lung system as it can help to moisten the organs and disperse Heat, which is beneficial for treating dryness and restoring the health of the lips.

SP-3 (Tàibái)

Location: Found on the inner side of the foot, just above the bony protrusion at the base of the big toe, in the area where the colour of the sole transitions to the paler skin of the foot arch.

Why: SP-3 is a key acupoint on the Spleen meridian. Stimulating this area can support the Spleen in its role of transforming nutrients into Qi and blood, thereby improving nourishment of the muscles and flesh and helping to address Spleen deficiency, a root cause of lip dryness.

ST-44 (Nèitíng)

Location: Found on the dorsum of the foot, between the 2nd and 3rd toes.

Why: ST-44 is effective in clearing Stomach Heat, which is important as excess heat in the Stomach, often linked to digestive issues, can manifest on the lips. This point helps in cooling down internal Heat and is beneficial for conditions where lip dryness is accompanied by symptoms such as mouth ulcers or bad breath, key indicators of Stomach Heat.

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LI-4 (Hégǔ):

Location: On the back of the hand, on the fleshy part of the webbing between thumb and index finger.

Why: A powerful point, known for its ability to circulate Qi and blood throughout the body, it is particularly effective in addressing issues related to the face and head, including the lips. Stimulating LI-4 can help in alleviating symptoms of chapped lips, especially when they are related to Qi stagnation or external pathogenic factors such as Wind-Heat.

Yang Sheng Practices

There are many practices, lifestyle choices, self-care tools and supplements that can be used to help manage the symptoms and the root cause of chapped lips, including:

- **Qigong:** The gentle practice of Qigong, combining movement, breathwork and mindfulness will help to balance and enhance the flow of Qi in the body, strengthening all five key organs. Focusing on movements that open and expand the chest, such as “Dragon Clears a Path” will strengthen Lung Qi, whereas “Crane Looks Behind”, from the 12 Rivers sequence, will invigorate Spleen Qi. Simple twisting at the waist exercises will boost circulation and especially support the function of the Large Intestine.
- **Breathwork:** Deep, controlled breathing techniques will help to improve Lung function, oxygenate the body and promote the efficient distribution of Qi. It will also support the Large Intestine, encouraging improved peristalsis and efficient elimination of waste, toxins and Heat from the body.
- **Meditation:** Stress can significantly influence Spleen Qi, so practices such as meditation and mindfulness can play a huge role in supporting Spleen health, managing stress and reducing the occurrence of digestive issues such as Damp-Phlegm or Heat, which have such a negative impact on the efficient distribution of nutrients to the skin and, by extension, the lip area.

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- Gua Sha and Massage: Gentle Gua Sha around the lip area, using the rounded edge of a Gua Sha tool with a little oil to provide sufficient glide, can help to promote circulation and moisture, bringing fresh blood and nutrients to help heal chapped and sore lips. Abdominal massage in a clockwise direction, using a stronger body Gua Sha tool, can help to stimulate the Large Intestine, aiding in the elimination of waste and the release of held emotions.
- Dietary Choices: Consuming warm and easily digestible, fibre-rich foods such as whole grains, vegetables and seasonal fruits will help to maintain regular bowel movements, supporting the Large Intestine, as well as strengthening the Spleen and digestive system, whilst adding in moistening foods such as pears and honey, can support Lung health. Limit over consumption of alcohol and caffeine and avoid eating foods straight from the fridge or dishes that are overly greasy, spicy or excessively sweet, as this can be a burden on the body, exacerbating internal landscapes such as Stomach Heat, Damp or Phlegm. It is important to eat at regular times, chewing slowly to promote efficient digestive processes and to encourage the movement of food through the gut.
- Hydration: Adequate water intake is crucial for maintaining fluid levels in the body generally, as well as specifically ensuring against Lung dryness. This is particularly important in hot weather or during the colder weather when heated indoor environments, such as central heating, can highlight the problem. Sufficient water intake is also essential for Large Intestine health, as it aids in digestion and the smooth passage of waste. Ensure water is as pure as possible and drink at room temperature or as a seasonal tea.
- Lip Licking and Biting: Habits such as frequent licking of the lips or biting flaking skin can aggravate dryness. This is because saliva, whilst momentarily moisturising, will actually dry out the delicate lip skin as it evaporates. Instead, use a high quality, organic lip balm with natural ingredients for symptom relief as the underlying root cause is addressed.

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Useful Supplements

There are many helpful supplements that can be taken as both preventative self-care and to alleviate symptoms of chapped lips, these include:

- **Astragalus:** Known for its immune-boosting and Qi-strengthening properties, Astragalus is helpful in improving overall vitality to ensure the body is able to deliver nutrients and nourishment to the skin and muscles efficiently, including the lip area.
- **Dang Gui (Angelica Sinensis):** Often used to nourish and invigorate blood, Dang Gui can be helpful in cases where chapped lips are a result of blood deficiency.
- **American Ginseng:** Known for its cooling properties, American Ginseng can nourish Yin and clear internal Heat. It is helpful for chapped lips associated with Yin deficiency or internal dryness.
- **Liquorice Root:** Liquorice is a harmoniser in Chinese Medicine, meaning it helps to boost the effectiveness of other herbs. It also supports Spleen health, which can benefit skin nourishment to positively impact the condition of the lips.
- **Shiitake Mushroom:** Shiitake supports skin health and healing, it also works to open blood vessels and enhance the movement of blood, essential to nourish stressed lips.
- **Chrysanthemum Tea:** Known for its cooling and calming properties, chrysanthemum tea can support the Lungs and respiratory health and help in clearing Heat, thereby soothing the lips if chapping is due to excess Heat in the body.

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- Green Tea: Rich in antioxidants, drinking green tea can help improve skin hydration and health, and applying cool green tea to the lips as a poultice can provide soothing relief, especially if the lips are sore and cracking.
- Honey: Naturally moistening and nourishing for the body, honey can be made into a simple honey water drink or used topically to help moisten and heal the lip area.
- Coconut Oil and Vitamin E: Known for their moisturising and hydrating properties, coconut oil or Vitamin E can be applied topically, providing immediate relief for dry, cracked lips.

Conclusion

Addressing chapped lips with the principles of Chinese Medicine involves a comprehensive approach that goes beyond topical treatments that simply treat the symptoms. By focusing on nourishing and balancing the Lung, Spleen and Large Intestine Qi, the root causes of chapped lips can be efficiently managed. Yang Sheng practices such as Qigong and Gua Sha, along with breathwork, meditation and the management of emotions, will be a powerful solution to not only lessening symptoms but avoiding a recurrence of the condition in the future. These practices, together with the thoughtful use of supplements, mindful dietary habits and lifestyle choices, embody the essence of Yang Sheng — nurturing life, promoting overall wellbeing and demonstrating the connection between internal and external health.

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Want to know more?

We will be delighted to support you as you continue along your Yang Sheng journey.

The following will get you started:

'Yang Sheng: The Art of Chinese Self-Healing' available on Amazon, Waterstone and www.hayoumethod.com

Buy Yang Sheng Book

Healing Movement classes (3 x each week) and live meditations for a more in-depth and healing practice – full details [here](#)

Free Masterclass "[Master Your Health](#)" – understand the 3- step plan for preventative health. Find more Healing Masterclasses [here](#).

Free self-care weekly content [@katiebrindle](#) on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

Free regular gua sha demonstrations on [@thehayoumethod](#) Instagram & the opportunity to purchase the accompanying tools from www.hayoumethod.com

DISCLAIMER:

Please note that any of these Yang Sheng techniques are designed to support your overall self-care and wellbeing and should not be used as a substitute for any Western medical advice or treatment that you may be receiving. You should not use the information in this Guide or on our website for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease and must always consult your doctor if you have any health concerns. Additionally, please note that there are a few contraindications to Yang Sheng techniques, so please visit www.hayoumethod.com to view our comprehensive FAQs.

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