

Research on the Prevention and Treatment Strategies and Mechanisms of Malignant Tumors Based on the Theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Disease Prevention and Treatment

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Abstract: The concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" is one of the core theories in the field of traditional Chinese medicine. It focuses on adjusting the physiological and psychological states of the human body before the onset of disease, thereby enhancing the body's immunity and resistance to achieve the purpose of preventing diseases and promoting health. This paper starts from the basic concept of the "preventing disease before it occurs" concept and explores the treatment principles followed in the prevention and treatment of malignant tumors, providing the application value and methods in clinical practice. Through literature review and analysis of the experience of famous doctors, this paper explores the application of the "preventing disease before it occurs" concept in the prevention of different diseases and also looks forward to the future of this concept in the development of modern medicine.

1. Introduction

The National Cancer Center of China released the latest data in 2022, showing that in 2016, there were approximately 4.064 million new cancer cases and about 2.4135 million new cancer deaths in China[1]. Currently, malignant tumors are one of the most serious diseases threatening human health, with their incidence and mortality rates rising year by year, becoming a major cause of death and a significant public health issue[2]. In recent years, with the continuous improvement of diagnostic and therapeutic levels in the field of oncology, including surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, endocrine therapy, targeted therapy, and the use of immunosuppressants [3], the survival period of cancer patients has been extended, and the number of patients living with cancer has been increasing. The involvement of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has played a crucial role in the prevention and treatment of malignant tumors. TCM is of great significance in the prevention of precancerous diseases and the management of adverse reactions related to cancer treatment.

2. The Concept of "Preventing Disease before It Occurs" in Traditional Chinese Medicine

The concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" in traditional Chinese medicine has a long history, originating from the "Huangdi Neijing" (The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor). The "Suwen · Siqu Tiaoshen Dailun" (Simple Questions · The Great Treatise on the Regulation of the Four Qi) states: "The sage does not treat the disease that has already occurred, but prevents the disease that has not yet occurred; does not treat the disorder that has already occurred, but prevents the disorder that has not yet occurred." [4] "Preventing disease before it occurs" means to prevent the occurrence of diseases by adjusting various factors such as the physiology, psychology, and social environment of the human body before the disease occurs. This theory emphasizes the early intervention and prevention of diseases on the basis of weakening the causes of disease and enhancing the body's immunity. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that the occurrence of diseases is related to various factors, including physical constitution, environment, and emotions. Therefore, by balancing the yin and yang of the human body, regulating qi and blood, and maintaining emotional stability, one can enhance the body's self-healing ability and reduce the risk of diseases [5]. The human body is an organic whole, with various organs, meridians, and qi and blood interrelated and influencing each other. The strength or weakness of one's physical constitution determines the susceptibility to diseases. For example, individuals with yang deficiency are more susceptible to cold pathogenic factors, while those with yin deficiency are prone to internal heat. Environmental factors include both natural and social environments. In the natural environment, climatic changes and regional differences, such as extreme cold, heat, and dampness, can all become pathogenic factors. In the social environment, work pressure, pace of life, and interpersonal relationships can also affect human health. In terms of emotions, excessive joy, anger, sorrow, pensiveness, grief, fear, and shock can lead to dysfunction of the organs, such as anger harming the liver, joy harming the heart, and pensiveness harming the spleen. Therefore, by balancing the yin and yang, regulating qi and blood, and maintaining emotional stability, one can enhance the body's self-healing ability and reduce the risk of diseases. Following the "Huangdi Neijing", medical scholars throughout the dynasties have regarded the concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" as an important theoretical guiding principle and applied it to clinical practice. In Zhang Zhongjing's "Jingui Yaolue · Zangfu Jingluo Xianhou Bingmai Zheng" (Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet · Diseases of the Viscera and Meridians and the Sequence of Symptoms), it is stated: "When the liver is diseased, knowing that the liver can transmit the disease to the spleen, one should first strengthen the spleen." During the Qing Dynasty, Ye Tianshi proposed the concept of "securing the areas not yet invaded by pathogenic factors". The concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" has continuously evolved in clinical applications, with detailed content and a complete system, and has been deeply integrated into the prevention and treatment of specialized diseases [6]. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in preventing disease before it occurs adheres to the concepts of "unity of heaven and humanity" and "treating the root cause of disease". The concept of "unity of heaven and humanity" posits that the human body and nature form an interrelated whole, with changes in nature affecting the human body, which should therefore adapt to natural changes for health preservation and treatment. For example, in spring when yang energy rises, one should go to bed early and rise early, and participate more in outdoor activities to promote the growth of yang energy; in winter, it is advisable to go to bed early and rise late, and avoid excessive fatigue to conserve the body's yang energy. The concept of "treating the root cause of disease" requires identifying the fundamental cause of the disease and treating it directly, rather than merely alleviating surface symptoms. TCM in preventing disease before it occurs starts with maintaining the balance of yin and yang in the body. The balance of yin and yang is the foundation of human health, and their disharmony can lead to the occurrence of diseases. When the body's yin

and yang are out of balance, various symptoms can occur, such as yin deficiency leading to heat, manifested as hot flashes, night sweats, and dry mouth; yang deficiency leading to cold, manifested as aversion to cold, cold limbs, and abdominal pain. Therefore, adjusting the balance of yin and yang is key to TCM in preventing disease before it occurs. The basic principles of preventing disease before it occurs include enhancing vital energy, avoiding pathogenic factors, early diagnosis and treatment, and preventing the spread of disease. Enhancing vital energy involves strengthening the body's resistance through methods such as dietary adjustment, physical exercise, and medicinal regulation, such as appropriately consuming foods and medicines with the effects of replenishing qi and blood, and nourishing yin and yang, and engaging in aerobic exercises like Tai Chi and Baduanjin. Avoiding pathogenic factors requires people to avoid contact with external disease-causing factors, such as paying attention to personal hygiene to prevent bacterial infections; and adjusting clothing according to climate changes to avoid the invasion of pathogenic factors such as wind, cold, heat, dampness, dryness, and fire. Early diagnosis and treatment emphasize the early detection and treatment of diseases, through methods such as regular physical examinations and self-observation, to promptly identify abnormal changes in the body and intervene effectively in the early stages of disease. Preventing the spread of disease involves taking appropriate measures after the onset of disease, according to the laws of disease development, to prevent further spread and damage to other organ functions.

3. Application of the Theory of Preventing Disease Before It Occurs in the Prevention and Treatment of Malignant Tumors

3.1 Prevention Before Cancer

In "Wai Zheng Yi An Hui Bian" (Compilation of Medical Cases of External Diseases), it is stated: "Deficiency of vital energy leads to the formation of tumors." Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) considers congenital vital energy and acquired grain qi as important components of vital energy[7]. If there is insufficient congenital kidney essence, such as due to weak parental constitution or improper prenatal care, it can lead to a deficiency in the fetus's innate endowment and kidney essence. Acquired dysfunction of the spleen and stomach, such as improper diet, overeating, excessive fatigue, and excessive worry injuring the spleen, can affect the digestion of food and absorption of nutrients by the spleen and stomach, leading to a lack of source for the production of qi and blood, and deficiency of vital energy. At this time, cancerous pathogenic factors can easily invade internally when there is a deficiency. Therefore, deficiency of vital energy and invasion of pathogenic factors are the intrinsic factors and core pathogenesis of tumor development. Professor Li Jiageng believes that the occurrence and development of malignant tumors are closely related to aging. As age increases, the functions of the body's organs gradually decline, especially the spleen and kidney. The kidney is the foundation of congenital constitution, responsible for storing essence. Deficiency of kidney essence can affect the body's growth, development, and reproductive functions, and also lead to a decrease in the body's resistance. The spleen is the foundation of acquired constitution, responsible for transformation and transportation. Weakening of the spleen and stomach functions prevents the conversion of food into sufficient nutrients, leading to insufficient production of qi and blood, and further exacerbating the deficiency of vital energy. In clinical practice, special emphasis is placed on consolidating and protecting the spleen and kidney in the elderly or those with insufficient spleen and kidney functions, and this approach is maintained throughout the treatment. In treatment, prescriptions in the form of pills and ointments are mainly used in clinical practice. Pills have the characteristics of slow absorption and long-lasting medicinal effect, making them suitable for long-term use in the regulation of chronic diseases. Ointments are made by repeatedly decocting and concentrating traditional Chinese

medicine, and adding adjuvants such as honey and donkey-hide gelatin, resulting in a better taste and ease of preservation and administration. Medication should not be overly nourishing or drastic; instead, it should be gentle and focus on slow supplementation for preventive purposes. Overly nourishing or drastic medicines may increase the burden on the spleen and stomach, leading to indigestion and other problems, while gentle medicines can regulate the body without causing excessive strain. Personal unhealthy lifestyle habits and external environmental factors are significant inducers of the occurrence and progression of tumors. Zhang Zhongjing in "Shanghan Zabing Lun" (Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Diseases) stated: "If one can be cautious in self-cultivation and not allow pathogenic winds to invade the meridians," and "Do not violate the law, avoid injuries from animals, ensure the house is not in disrepair, and moderate the intake of cold, hot, bitter, sour, pungent, and sweet foods to prevent physical decline, thus preventing diseases from entering the interstices of the body." This highlights the positive significance of self-cultivation and prudence in preventing diseases before they occur and introduces specific preventive measures. Unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as staying up late, can disrupt the body's circadian rhythm, affect the normal functions of the organs, lead to disharmony of qi and blood, and decrease immunity. Excessive smoking and alcohol consumption can directly damage organs such as the lungs and liver, increasing the risk of cancer. Regarding external environmental factors, long-term exposure to polluted environments, such as air, water, and soil pollution, can lead to contact with various harmful substances, such as chemicals and radioactive materials, which may induce gene mutations and lead to the occurrence of tumors. It is suggested that the body can enhance its vital energy by maintaining a healthy diet, moderate exercise, and regular work and rest, and by being cautious of wind-cold, adjusting clothing according to weather changes to avoid the invasion of pathogenic factors such as wind-cold. In accordance with the four seasons of nature, in spring when yang energy rises, one should go to bed early and rise early, and participate in outdoor activities such as walking and spring outings to promote the growth of yang energy; in the hot summer, one should moderately consume cooling foods like watermelon and mung beans, but avoid excessive cold drinks; in the dry autumn, one should consume more moist and juicy foods like pears, lily bulbs, and white fungus to moisten the lungs and produce body fluids; in the cold winter, one should keep warm and consume more warming foods like mutton to supplement the body's yang energy. In this way, one can resist the invasion of external pathogenic factors and prevent the occurrence of diseases, which is the key to disease prevention. Functional gastrointestinal disorders are a category of diseases primarily characterized by gastrointestinal dysfunction without organic lesions. Based on the TCM theories of "unity of heaven and humanity" and "four-season health preservation," patients are guided to avoid pathogenic factors and support vital energy. In spring, avoid wind-cold and refrain from spicy foods; in the hot summer, moderately consume cooling foods like watermelon and mung beans; in the dry autumn, consume more moist and juicy foods; in the cold winter, keep warm and consume more warming foods like mutton. Based on the theory of the five spirit organs and emotional regulation, patients are guided to maintain a smooth emotional state and a positive mindset, achieving the goal of "serenity and inner peace." Gastric precancerous lesions (PLGC) refer to pathological changes that are more likely to transform into cancerous tissues[8], developing on the basis of chronic atrophic gastritis (CAG), with dysplasia being a direct precancerous change, and no specific clinical manifestations. The widely accepted mode of gastric cancer evolution is normal gastric mucosa → chronic inflammation → atrophic gastritis → intestinal metaplasia → intraepithelial neoplasia → gastric cancer[9]. Professor Liu Huayi believes that the disease is fundamentally characterized by spleen qi deficiency, with symptoms of qi stagnation, damp phlegm, food accumulation, and stasis-toxin. The treatment focuses on supporting vital energy and removing stasis, with particular emphasis on the treatment of *Helicobacter pylori* infection, often selecting heat-clearing and detoxifying, as well as dampness-removing herbs, such

as coptis, scutellaria, dandelion, Oldenlandia, and honeysuckle, which can promote the negativity of HP[10]. Breast cancer precancerous lesions refer to a variety of benign breast diseases with different pathological types but a high risk of malignant transformation, such as cystic hyperplasia of the breast and intraductal papilloma of the breast[11]. The renowned traditional Chinese medicine practitioner Dong Shifeng believes that this disease is often caused by kidney yang deficiency, weak propulsion, qi stagnation, blocked mammary ducts, plus the failure of fire to warm the earth, leading to weakened spleen yang, internal retention of phlegm and dampness, obstruction of the liver's free flow and drainage, disharmony between the liver and spleen, failure of transportation and distribution, and blood stasis forming lumps[12]. The treatment methods include soothing the liver and strengthening the spleen, resolving stasis and eliminating lumps, and softening and breaking hard lumps, with the self-prescribed formula "Xiao Jie Tang" as the basis for modification and treatment. In the formula, bupleurum and curcuma soothe the liver and regulate qi, promoting the free flow of liver qi; atractylodes and poria strengthen the spleen and boost qi, enhancing the transformation and transportation functions of the spleen and stomach; zedoary and curcuma activate blood and resolve stasis, dispersing lumps; zhebeimu and oyster soften and disperse hard lumps, causing them to soften and dissipate.

3.2 Prevention of Cancer Metastasis

First, secure the areas not yet invaded by pathogenic factors to prevent tumor metastasis. In the diagnosis and treatment of diseases, merely treating the affected areas is far from sufficient. It is also necessary to understand the laws of disease transmission, accurately predict the direction of pathogenic factor transmission, and take preventive measures for areas that may be affected, to prevent the disease from spreading to those areas and to terminate its development and transmission[13]. In "Jingui Yaolue Zangfu Jingluo Xianhou Bing" (Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet · Diseases of the Viscera and Meridians and the Sequence of Symptoms), it is stated: "For those who treat diseases before they occur, when the liver is diseased, knowing that the liver can transmit the disease to the spleen, one should first strengthen the spleen." Based on the theory of the Five Elements and their mutual generation and restrain, the liver belongs to wood and the spleen to earth, with the liver wood most likely to overcontrol the spleen earth. Therefore, in the treatment of primary liver cancer, appropriate spleen-strengthening and stomach-harmonizing medicines should be used. During the development of primary liver cancer, the liver's lesions can easily affect the functions of the spleen and stomach, leading to dysfunction in transformation and transportation, resulting in symptoms such as loss of appetite, abdominal distension, and diarrhea. By strengthening the spleen and harmonizing the stomach, the functions of the spleen and stomach can be enhanced, improving the body's digestive and absorptive capabilities, providing sufficient nutrition for the body, and also preventing the liver wood from further overcontrolling the spleen earth, blocking the transmission of the disease. After chemotherapy, tumor patients often suffer damage to the spleen and stomach. The spleen and stomach are the pivot of the ascending and descending of qi. The spleen is the foundation of acquired constitution and is in charge of the limbs and muscles. If the spleen qi is deficient, the transformation and transportation of qi and blood will lack a source, which can easily lead to fatigue in the lower limbs. Chemotherapy drugs are mostly aggressive substances. While killing tumor cells, they also cause damage to normal cells and the functions of the viscera, with the spleen and stomach being the first to be affected. When the spleen and stomach are damaged, their transformation and transportation functions are weakened, and they cannot convert food into sufficient qi and blood, resulting in the limbs and muscles not getting enough nutritional supply, thus causing symptoms of fatigue and weakness in the lower limbs. In traditional Chinese medicine, the lung is considered to govern qi, control respiration, and regulate

the qi of the entire body. Deficiency of lung qi can easily lead to symptoms such as shortness of breath, reluctance to speak, and spontaneous sweating. According to the theory of the Five Elements' generation relationship, the spleen and lung are in a mother-child relationship. The lung is a delicate organ, susceptible to pathogenic factors leading to deficiency. If the spleen and stomach are damaged, the lung is easily affected, resulting in the mother and child both being ill. The spleen and stomach are the source of the production of qi and blood. Weakness of the spleen and stomach leads to insufficient production of qi and blood, which in turn causes deficiency of lung qi. Weak lung qi leads to weakened respiratory function, presenting symptoms such as shortness of breath and reluctance to speak, and also results in spontaneous sweating due to the instability of defensive qi. As stated in "Suwen · Yujizhen Zang Lun": "All the five viscera receive qi from the stomach, which is the foundation of the five viscera." This highlights that the spleen and stomach are the source of vital qi and the foundation of the human body's acquired constitution. Zhang Zhongjing established the method of acrid dispersion and bitter drainage to balance cold and heat, emphasizing the important role of the spleen and stomach in the ascending and descending of qi. The spleen and stomach play a crucial pivotal role in the ascending and descending of qi in the human body. The spleen qi is primarily responsible for ascending, transporting the essence of food and drink upward to the heart, lungs, and other viscera; the stomach qi is mainly responsible for descending, expelling food residues downward out of the body. The method of acrid dispersion and bitter drainage, such as Banxia Xiexin Tang, contains Banxia and Ganjiang which are acrid and warm, dispersing cold and resolving stagnation; Huanglian and Huangqin which are bitter and cold, purging heat and reducing inflammation. Through acrid dispersion and bitter drainage, the qi mechanism of the spleen and stomach is regulated, and their normal functions are restored. Among the viscera, physiologically there exist interdependent and mutually restraining relationships of generation and restrain; pathologically there exist interinfluential and transmissive relationships of over-restraint and counter-restraint. When one viscus is diseased, it can affect other viscera according to its own laws. As pointed out in "Suwen Yujizhen Zang Lun": "The five viscera receive qi from their sources and transmit it to their targets; qi resides in its sources and perishes in its non-targets." A disease in one viscus can affect the related viscera. Therefore, in the treatment of tumor metastasis, it is essential to start from a holistic perspective, taking into account the relationships of generation, restrain, over-restraint, and counter-restraint among the viscera, and treat or stabilize the viscera not yet affected by the disease first [14], to block the pathways of disease transmission, prevent the spread of the disease, and promote the disease to develop towards recovery. In the treatment of lung cancer metastasis, if patients with lung cancer show symptoms of spleen and stomach deficiency, in addition to treating the lung cancer itself, it is also necessary to focus on regulating the spleen and stomach, enhancing their functions, to prevent the disease from further transmitting to other viscera. Through this holistic treatment approach, the overall health level of patients can be improved and the therapeutic effect can be enhanced.

3.3 Prevention of Cancer Recurrence after Treatment

Patients with malignant tumors, especially those in the middle and late stages according to pathological staging, still have a high rate of recurrence and metastasis even after systematic and standardized comprehensive anti-tumor treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, and interventional therapy. Some special types of tumors, such as triple-negative breast cancer, have unique pathological features and biological characteristics, lack molecular therapeutic targets, have poor therapeutic effects, and high mortality rates. Therefore, how to improve the therapeutic effect and prognosis has become a current research hotspot [15][16]. For

patients with advanced tumors, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) employs syndrome differentiation and treatment to achieve a stable state of yin-yang balance in the body, thereby improving the quality of life and extending the survival period. The treatment goal is to attain "yin-yang harmony and long-term survival with tumors." Post-illness care to prevent recurrence: After the initial recovery from illness, the yin-yang balance of the human body has not yet fully recovered, and the body's functions have not yet fully restored. At this time, attention should be paid to care and adjustment to prevent the recurrence of the disease. Pay attention to post-illness care to restore the vital energy, and protecting the stomach qi is an important principle to promote recovery. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has significant advantages in this regard. TCM believes that although the symptoms disappear after the initial recovery from illness, the pathogenic factors have not been completely eliminated, the vital energy has not been fully restored, the qi and blood are not yet stable, and the yin and yang are not yet balanced. Therefore, after the illness, by nourishing and supplementing the vital energy and regulating the functions of the viscera, the disordered state can be restored. In summary, the academic thought of "preventing disease before it occurs" in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a long history. Guiding the work of TCM oncology with this thought has important value. It is similar to the current "three-level prevention" of tumors but emphasizes the holistic concept of harmony between humans and nature and people-oriented more. It also has the advantage of individualized syndrome differentiation. Especially in dealing with the prevention of deterioration of cancerous changes and the prevention of recurrence and metastasis after tumor surgery, it has good effects through supporting the body's vital energy and eliminating pathogenic factors. Therefore, it is more comprehensive and distinctive[17].

4. Conclusion

The TCM concept of "preventing disease before it occurs" highly coincides with the modern medical concept of three-level prevention of tumors, which is conducive to reducing the incidence of malignant tumors. For patients with tumors that have already occurred, early treatment is emphasized to improve clinical symptoms and prognosis, thereby alleviating the physical and mental suffering of patients and reducing the economic burden and pressure on individuals and society, bringing good social benefits. Regarding the occurrence of precancerous diseases, many experts have proposed to treat from the syndrome differentiation of the five viscera, comprehensively considering factors such as patients' age and living environment, and always paying attention to regulating emotions to reduce the incidence of malignant tumors. For the adverse reactions that occur during the treatment of tumor patients, such as bone marrow suppression, peripheral neuropathy, gastrointestinal reactions, and hypercoagulable state after chemotherapy, the early and full participation of traditional Chinese medicine and drugs has reduced the incidence of adverse reactions after chemotherapy and enhanced the effect of chemotherapeutic drugs. Traditional Chinese medicine, starting from the holistic concept and the idea of harmony between humans and nature, has played a significant role in protecting vital energy, regulating the functions of the viscera, and maintaining the balance of yin-yang and qi-blood. Through the deeper integration and application of traditional Chinese and Western medicine, the incidence of malignant tumors can be gradually reduced, and the cure rate can be effectively improved, thereby benefiting the public. Currently, the Western medical treatment of malignant tumors has entered the era of targeted and immunotherapy, and the full participation of traditional Chinese medicine has become more important. With reverence for life, continuous improvement, and the integration of traditional Chinese and Western medicine, we can reduce the suffering of patients with malignant tumors, alleviate their economic burden, and bring more blessings.

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