

# *Analysis of the Approach to Selecting Herbs for External Wash Formulas for Facial Dermatitis Based on Skin Lesion Pattern Differentiation*

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**Abstract:** Facial dermatitis is a common condition in dermatology. According to its clinical manifestations and affected location, it can be categorized in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) under disease terms such as “facial wandering wind”, “powder-flower sore”, “rosacea-like nose”, and “medicinal toxin”. Although these diseases differ in name, their skin lesions share highly consistent features, all centering on facial erythema accompanied by burning sensation, pruritus, dryness, and scaling. Based on this, TCM achieves the therapeutic principle of “treating different diseases with the same method.” This article proceeds from the core pathogenesis of “blood-heat as the root, wind pathogen as the manifestation, and Yin/(Yin represents the nourishing, moistening, and cooling aspect of the body) damage as the transformation,” and categorizes commonly used external wash herbs according to their functions into three groups: those that clear heat and cool blood, those that dispel wind and relieve itching, and those that moisten dryness and engender flesh. The nature, taste, channel tropism, specific actions, and characteristics for external use of each herb are discussed. A formula construction strategy of “first identifying the predominant symptom, then determining the herb category, and finally considering modifications” is proposed, and combination schemes for eight common skin lesion patterns are summarized. Grounded in skin lesion pattern differentiation and characterized by the selection of concise, targeted herbs, this article aims to provide a reference for clinical herb selection in Chinese herbal external wash therapy for facial dermatitis.

## 1. Introduction

Facial dermatitis refers to non-infectious inflammation occurring on the face and is a common condition in dermatology outpatient settings. It encompasses various pathological types, including rosacea, contact dermatitis, corticosteroid-induced dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, and photosensitive dermatitis. Despite differing etiologies and disease names, these conditions share

highly consistent clinical manifestations: aggravation following sun exposure, emotional excitement, sudden temperature changes, or consumption of spicy foods, with skin lesions centered on facial erythema, with or without scaling, pruritus, burning sensation, and desquamation. In TCM treatment, this aligns with the principle of "treating different diseases with the same method." The understanding of facial dermatitis in TCM has a long history. According to its clinical manifestations and location, it can be categorized under terms. In terms of pathogenesis, TCM conducts pattern differentiation based on the characteristics of the skin lesions. Facial erythema reflects the external manifestation of blood-heat; the burning sensation results from heat pathogen steaming the skin; scaling and dryness are due to insufficiency of *Yin* (*Yin represents the nourishing, moistening, and cooling aspect of the body.*) fluid, *Yin*-deficiency internal heat, or blood-deficiency generating wind-dryness; pruritus is associated with wind pathogen, as stated in the *Zhubing Yuanhou Lun*: "Wind-induced pruritus occurs when a deficient body contracts wind, which enters the interstices and striae, contending with *Qi* (*A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force"*) and blood." Consequently, the core pathogenesis of facial dermatitis can be summarized as "blood-heat as the root, wind pathogen as the manifestation, and *Yin* damage as the transformation." External treatment choices must be based on pattern differentiation accordingly. Modern medical research has elucidated the pathogenesis of facial dermatitis from multiple dimensions: impaired skin barrier function, immune-inflammatory imbalance, vasodilation and inflammatory infiltration, neurovascular dysregulation, skin microecological imbalance, among others. Furthermore, environmental factors such as ultraviolet radiation, drastic temperature changes, and cosmetic irritation, as well as genetic susceptibility, act as important triggers that jointly drive the onset and progression of the disease alongside the aforementioned mechanisms. Although Western medical treatments for facial dermatitis act rapidly and have clear mechanisms, they exhibit notable deficiencies in long-term management, safety, post-treatment relapse, and holistic regulation. TCM external therapy has a long history; for dermatological conditions, externally applied Chinese medicine can penetrate the interstices and striae, delivering medicinal effects directly to the affected area with high safety and offering distinct advantages.

## 2. Pathogenesis Analysis

Although facial dermatitis encompasses various disease names, the TCM understanding of its pathogenesis possesses intrinsic unity. Tracing its origin, it primarily revolves around the interplay of three key pathological elements: blood-heat, *Yin* (*Yin represents the nourishing, moistening, and cooling aspect of the body.*) deficiency, and wind pathogen. From the perspective of external treatment, the above pathogenesis ultimately manifests in the local skin through abnormalities in color, temperature, moisture/dryness, and sensation, providing a basis for the selection of topically applied Chinese herbs.

### 2.1 Heat Pathogen as the Foundation, Internal Accumulation of Blood-Heat

Heat pathogen is the initiating factor in the formation of local skin lesions in facial dermatitis. Regardless of whether heat originates from external contraction or internal generation, it ultimately flares upward to the face, stagnating and binding in the interstices and striae of the skin and flesh. Heat enters the blood aspect, driving reckless blood flow, causing local vessel dilation and fullness, and erupting externally as bright red facial macules that feel warm to the touch. *The Wenre Lun* states<sup>[1]</sup>: "Macules and papules are all signs of pathogenic *Qi* (*A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force"*) revealing itself outward." The color, distribution, and accompanying symptoms of macules can directly reflect the depth of pathogenic factors and the progression or regression of the disease, providing a reference for clinical treatment. *The*

*YizongJinjian* states regarding it that "arises from pre-existing blood-dryness and excessive consumption of spicy, rich foods, leading to damp-heat in the Yangming stomach channel contracting wind." Although this speaks of dietary internal causes, the local skin lesions manifest as erythema and burning sensation, precisely reflecting the external expression of stagnated heat along the Yangming channel. Externally, treatment should prioritize clearing heat and cooling blood <sup>[2]</sup>, achieving the effect of opening the exterior and outthrusting heat, allowing the medicinals to act directly on the local lesions to clear blood-aspect stagnated heat.

## 2.2 Yin Deficiency as the Transformation, Skin Losing Moisture

Yin deficiency is a critical link in the transformation of facial dermatitis from excess to deficiency. From the perspective of external treatment, its significance lies in the damage to the structure and function of the skin barrier, manifesting as loss of moisture and impaired barrier function. Prolonged constraint of heat pathogen scorches and consumes local yin fluid, leading to decreased water content in the stratum corneum and thinning or loss of the sebaceous membrane <sup>[3]</sup>, resulting in epidermal structural damage. *The YizongJinjian* describes a pattern of "wind sores" as "fire drying up blood," characterized by "dry skin, itching, vexation, and dry, bound stools," which highly corresponds to the *Yin*-deficiency syndrome of modern facial dermatitis. Clinically, burning sensation, dryness, scaling, and tightness appear together. Externally, treatment should emphasize moistening the skin and promoting repair. The *WaikeZhengzhiQuanshu* records when wind-dryness predominates, "there is cracking or oozing of blood-tinged fluid," and externally "fresh lard is frequently applied to moisten and rub it"<sup>[4]</sup> indicating that ancient practitioners already recognized that external treatment should adopt the method of moistening the skin.

## 2.3 Wind Pathogen as the Manifestation, Causing Itching and Liable to Change

Pruritus is the most distressing symptom for patients with facial dermatitis. From the perspective of external treatment, its core pathogenesis lies in "wind pathogen lodging in the skin surface." *The Zhubing Yuanhou Lun* states: "Wind-induced pruritus occurs when a deficient body contracts wind, which enters the interstices and striae, contending with *Qi* (A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force") and blood, moving back and forth within the skin. Because the pathogenic *Qi*(A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force") is faint, it cannot strike force fully to cause pain, hence merely causing pruritus." Wind pathogen often does not exist in isolation but intertwines with heat pathogen and *Yin* deficiency. First, blood-heat generates wind: intense heat pathogen can stir up wind; wind and heat contend with each other, intensifying the itching. Second, *Yin* deficiency stirs wind: deficiency of *Yin*-blood fails to nourish the skin and flesh, causing internal generation of deficient wind, manifesting as dry, scaling skin with itching in the chronic phase. During external treatment, it is necessary to discern the primary and secondary aspects based on the skin lesion manifestations and flexibly combine methods such as clearing heat, cooling blood, and enriching *Yin* to moisten dryness, thereby achieving precise local relief of itching.

## 3. Selection of Topically Applied Chinese Herb

### 3.1 For Erythema and Burning Sensation (Blood-Heat Pattern)

Herbs in this category are predominantly cold or cool in nature and primarily clear and resolve heat-toxin in the blood aspect. They are suitable for blood-heat patterns of facial dermatitis characterized by bright red erythema and a marked burning sensation. External washing can directly

act on locally dilated capillaries to reduce congestion and the inflammatory response.

### 3.1.1 *Portulaca Oleracea*

Sour and cold in nature, entering the liver and large intestine channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, cooling blood, and reducing swelling. When used externally, its actions emphasize anti-inflammatory effects and repair of the skin barrier, combining both blood-heat clearance and physical cooling. It excels at managing acute-phase lesions with bright red erythema, marked burning sensation, and significant barrier impairment. It has been confirmed that an emollient containing *Portulaca oleracea* extract significantly improves the clinical severity of atopic dermatitis in children <sup>[5]</sup>, and wet compresses with compound *Portulaca oleracea* lotion have demonstrated definite efficacy in treating facial corticosteroid-dependent dermatitis<sup>[6]</sup>.

### 3.1.2 *Viola Yedoensis*

Bitter, acrid, and cold in nature, entering the heart and liver channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, cooling blood, and reducing swelling. Used externally, its action emphasizes resolving toxins and dispersing nodules; its heat-clearing and toxin-resolving power is relatively strong. It excels at eliminating welling-abscess swellings and sores, making it particularly suitable for cases with pronounced redness, swelling, heat, and pain accompanied by papules and pustules.

### 3.1.3 *Rehmannia Glutinosa*

Sweet and cold in nature, entering the heart, liver, and kidney channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, cooling blood, nourishing *Yin*, and engendering fluids. Its characteristic in external use is cooling blood without damaging *Yin*; while clearing heat, it also possesses a nourishing property, making it appropriate for cases with exuberant heat but already showing signs of *Yin* damage, improving erythema accompanied by dryness and a tight sensation. Experimental studies have shown that *Rehmannia glutinosa* has an inhibitory effect on allergic contact dermatitis in mice <sup>[7]</sup>.

### 3.1.4 *Paeonia Suffruticosa*

Bitter, acrid, and slightly cold in nature, entering the heart and liver channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, cooling blood, invigorating blood, and dispersing stasis. Its external use characteristic is cooling blood without leaving behind stasis; paeonol, a constituent, can inhibit cyclooxygenase-2 activity. It excels at eliminating deep-lying heat in the blood aspect and unblocking and dispersing stasis. It is suitable for cases with dark red erythema, telangiectasia, or a tendency for hyperpigmentation.

### 3.1.5 *Isatis Indigotica*

Bitter and cold in nature, entering the heart and stomach channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, cooling blood, and resolving macules. Used externally, its power to cool blood and resolve macules is relatively strong, focusing on abating bright red macules caused by exuberant blood-heat-toxin erupting on the skin. It is suitable for acute-phase lesions with deep red erythema and intense burning heat. Indirubin, a constituent, possesses significant anti-inflammatory activity.

Overall, for patients with marked erythema and burning discomfort, blood-cooling herbs are primarily selected. *Portulaca oleracea* externally emphasizes anti-inflammatory action and skin barrier repair, adeptly treating acute-phase, bright red, burning, barrier-impaired lesions, commonly

used for atopic dermatitis and corticosteroid-induced dermatitis. *Viola yedoensis* specifically targets red, swollen, hot, painful lesions with papulopustular sore toxicity. *Rehmannia glutinosa* suits lesions with exuberant heat and *Yin* damage, where erythema coexists with dry, tight skin; it can inhibit allergic skin inflammation. *Paeonia suffruticosa* improves dark red erythema, telangiectasia, and hyperpigmentation. *Isatis indigotica* externally possesses strong blood-cooling power, abating deep red, burning acute-phase erythema caused by exuberant blood-heat-toxin, with prominent anti-inflammatory effects.

### 3.2 For Pruritus (Wind-Heat Pattern)

Herbs in this category primarily act by dispelling wind pathogen, clearing heat-toxin, and relieving itching. They are suitable for facial dermatitis patterns where pruritus is the main manifestation, belonging to wind exuberance causing itching or wind-heat invading the exterior.

#### 3.2.1 *Lonicera Japonica*

Sweet and cold in nature, entering the lung, heart, and stomach channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, and dispersing wind-heat. Its external use characteristic lies in simultaneous clearing and outthrusting: it can both clear blood-aspect heat-toxin and outthrust and disperse defensive-aspect wind-heat. Light in quality and ascending, it specifically reaches the facial skin and muscles, making it most suitable for cases where facial redness, burning, and itching occur simultaneously due to wind-heat flaring upward. Experimental studies show that *Lonicera japonica* inhibits dinitrofluorobenzene-induced allergic contact dermatitis in mice and exerts anti-type IV hypersensitivity effects<sup>[7]</sup>.

#### 3.2.2 *Chrysanthemum Morifolium*

Sweet, bitter, and slightly cold in nature, entering the lung and liver channels. Its core actions are dispersing wind-heat and clearing heat to resolve toxins. When used externally, it specializes in dispersing wind-heat from the head and face, being an essential herb for treating wind-heat patterns affecting the head and face region. It is effective for facial flushing and itching caused by wind-heat flaring upward. Yellow Chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) leans more toward dispersing wind-heat, while Wild Chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum indicum*) is stronger in resolving toxins.

#### 3.2.3 *Taraxacum Mongolicum*

Bitter, sweet, and cold in nature, entering the liver and stomach channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, and reducing swelling to dissipate nodules. Used externally, it excels at reducing welling-abscesses and dissipating nodules, while also possessing skin-moistening properties. It is highly effective for inflammatory lesions such as acne and folliculitis, particularly suitable for facial dermatitis accompanied by papules and pustules.

#### 3.2.4 *Dictamnus Dasyarpus*

Bitter and cold in nature, entering the spleen, stomach, and bladder channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, drying dampness, dispelling wind, and resolving toxins. Its unique feature in external use is simultaneously addressing internal damp-heat and dispelling external wind pathogen, making it a core herb in external anti-itch formulas. It is highly effective for eczematous dermatitis with intense itching. It has been developed as the core ingredient of proprietary Chinese medicines such as Chuanbai Anti-Itch Lotion and Ganlin Lotion. Research indicates that its main active constituents,

dictamnine, obacunone, and fraxinellone, can exert anti-dermatitis effects by inhibiting the JAK1-STAT3/STAT6 signaling pathway, reducing levels of pruritogenic cytokines such as IL-4 and IL-31<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3.2.5 Saposhnikovia Divaricata

Acrid, sweet, and slightly warm in nature, entering the bladder, liver, and spleen channels. Its core actions are dispelling wind, releasing the exterior, and overcoming dampness to stop itching. Known as the “moistening agent among wind herbs,” it is slightly warm and non-drying externally, without the drawback of warmth damaging *Yin*. It dispels wind without being harsh, relieves itching while also moistening the skin, making it one of the few wind-dispelling herbs suitable for sensitive facial skin.

### 3.2.6 Kochia Scoparia

Acrid, bitter, and cold in nature, entering the kidney and bladder channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, draining dampness, dispelling wind, and relieving itching. Its unique feature in external use lies in its combined action of promoting urination to drain dampness and dispelling wind to stop itching. By clearing and draining damp-heat, the wind loses its attachment, and itching spontaneously subsides. It is particularly suitable for damp-heat type itching (itching accompanied by exudation and oily skin). Kochia saponins possess anti-allergic activity and can inhibit hyaluronidase activity.

Overall, the clinical application of wind-dispersing, heat-clearing, anti-itch herbs has its own emphasis: *Lonicera japonica* is suitable for patients with evident wind-heat exterior pattern and concurrent erythema and itching; *Taraxacum mongolicum* targets swollen, infected lesions with papules and pustules; *Chrysanthemum morifolium* is often used for facial flushing and itching caused by wind-heat attacking upward; *Dictamnus dasycarpus* is particularly appropriate for intense eczematous itching with a tendency for exudation; *Saposhnikovia divaricata*, as a “moistening wind herb,” dispels wind and stops itching while also moistening the skin, with low irritancy, making it more suitable for sensitive skin; *Kochia scoparia* is often used for patients with damp-heat accumulation, facial oiliness, itching, and evident exudation.

## 3.3 For Dryness, Scaling, Tightness, and Subjective Burning Sensation (Yin-Deficiency Internal Dryness Pattern)

Herbs in this category primarily act by nourishing and moistening dryness, and repairing and engendering flesh. They are suitable for facial dermatitis patterns where dryness, scaling, tightness, impaired skin barrier, and a subjective burning sensation are the main manifestations, belonging to blood-deficiency wind-dryness or *Yin*-deficiency internal dryness patterns.

### 3.3.1 Bletilla Striata

Bitter, sweet, astringent, and slightly cold in nature, entering the lung, liver, and stomach channels. Its core actions are astringing to stop bleeding and reducing swelling to engender flesh. Externally, it is a core representative of the dryness-moistening, flesh-engendering category. Its texture is extremely viscous and rich in *Bletilla striata* polysaccharide (glucomannan). It can form a biomimetic hydration film on the skin surface, providing strong water-locking and moisturizing effects, while simultaneously promoting epithelial regeneration and repairing the damaged skin barrier. Among skin-moistening herbs, *Bletilla striata* is unique for its equal emphasis on astringing sores and engendering flesh and moisturizing with protective film formation. It is especially suitable

for cases with significant dryness, scaling, tightness, and severe barrier damage. Modern research indicates that *Bletilla striata* polysaccharide possesses various pharmacological activities, including anti-inflammatory, wound repair-promoting, immunomodulatory, and antioxidant effects, offering unique advantages in wound-healing dressings. Further studies have confirmed that *Bletilla striata* polysaccharide has a protective effect on oxidatively damaged human keratinocytes and can reduce inflammatory injury by modulating the JAK/STAT signaling pathway.

### 3.3.2 *Polygonatum Sibiricum*

Sweet and neutral in nature, entering the spleen, lung, and kidney channels. Its core actions are supplementing *Qi* (A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force"), nourishing *Yin*, moistening the lung, and boosting the kidney. Externally, it excels at nourishing *Yin* and moistening dryness. Its nature is gentle and balanced; it nourishes *Yin* without causing greasiness and moistens dryness without being cold. Among skin-moisturising medicinals, Solomon's seal is more inclined toward deep-level nourishment—it supplements *Yin* fluids from the deeper layers to moisten and enrich the skin. *Bletilla* primarily protects the exterior, while *Huangjing* takes charge of interior nourishment. The two work in tandem and are extremely low in irritancy.

### 3.3.3 *Cannabis Sativa*

Sweet and neutral in nature, entering the spleen, stomach, and large intestine channels. Externally, it is rich in plant oils and fats, which can directly supplement the lipid components of the sebaceous membrane, exerting actions of moistening dryness, lubricating the skin, and nourishing and moistening the skin surface. Among skin-moistening herbs, *Cannabis sativa* emphasizes "oil-based moistening," using oil to moisten dryness. It is suitable for dryness and scaling caused by a deficiency of sebum, particularly indicated for skin that is extremely dry with fine, scaly desquamation. It can be crushed before decoction to facilitate the release of oils.

### 3.3.4 *Dioscorea Opposita*

Sweet and neutral in nature, entering the spleen, lung, and kidney channels. Its core actions are supplementing the spleen, nourishing the stomach, engendering fluids, and boosting the lung. Externally, it is rich in mucilage protein and polysaccharides, providing moisturizing and soothing effects. Its nature is gentle and balanced; it moistens without being greasy. It emphasizes "fluid-engendering skin-moistening," especially suitable for sensitive skin and dry conditions with a weak barrier. As a medicinal-food homologous substance, its irritancy is extremely low.

### 3.3.5 *Astragalus Membranaceus*

Sweet and warm in nature, entering the spleen and lung channels. Its core actions are supplementing *Qi* (A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the "life force"), securing the exterior, expelling toxins, and promoting tissue regeneration. Externally, it emphasizes supplementing *Qi* to secure the exterior and strengthen the interstices and striae, enhancing skin barrier function and increasing the skin's tolerance to external stimuli. The *Astragalus* polysaccharides contained in it have immunomodulatory effects, making it particularly suitable for sensitive skin that is prone to recurrent flare-ups and has a weakened barrier function.

### 3.3.6 *Paeonia Lactiflora*

Bitter, sour, and slightly cold in nature, entering the liver and spleen channels. Its core actions are

nourishing blood, astringing *Yin*, emolliating the liver, and relaxing spasms. Externally, its sour astringing property can alleviate the subjective burning and tightness of the facial skin, and it can emolliate the liver to extinguish wind, thereby assisting in relieving itching. When combined with *Rehmannia glutinosa*, it can enhance the *Yin*-nourishing effect.

These six skin-moistening herbs each have their specific emphasis: *Bletilla striata* focuses on external protection, film formation, and barrier repair; *Bletilla* primarily acts on the exterior by forming a protective film and restoring the epidermal barrier. Solomon's seal operates at a deeper level, nourishing *Yin* to moisten and enrich the skin. Hemp seed supplements lipids, relieving dryness and emolliating the skin. Chinese yam gently generates fluids and alleviates cutaneous sensitivity. *Astragalus* boosts *Qi* and consolidates the exterior, thereby enhancing barrier tolerance. White peony root astringes *Yin* by virtue of its sour property and mitigates burning sensations and tightness. Clinically, these medicinals may be prescribed in combinations tailored to the type of cutaneous dryness, the degree of barrier impairment, and the accompanying symptoms, in accordance with the principles of pattern differentiation.

### 3.4 Herb for Harmonizing the Formula

*Glycyrrhiza uralensis*: Sweet and neutral in nature, entering the heart, lung, spleen, and stomach channels. Its core actions are clearing heat, resolving toxins, relaxing spasms, relieving pain, and harmonizing the effects of other herbs. When used externally, its action primarily tends toward harmonizing and relaxing spasms; its spasmolytic effect can relieve skin tightness and discomfort. *Glycyrrhizin* possesses anti-inflammatory and anti-allergic effects, which can reduce the irritancy of external medicinals and lower the incidence of allergic reactions. Experimental studies have confirmed that *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* exerts anti-type IV hypersensitivity effects. It is commonly used as a guiding herb in external wash formulas.

## 4. Photosensitivity and Allergy Safety Information

### 4.1 Herbs with Clearly Established Photosensitizing Potential

1) *Angelica dahurica*: Definitely contains coumarin-type photosensitizing components (such as imperatorin). Contraindicated in patients with photosensitive dermatitis; for other patients, strict sun protection is required after use.

2) *Taraxacum mongolicum*: Cases of plant-induced photodermatitis have been reported; use with caution in patients with photosensitive dermatitis.

3) *Chrysanthemum morifolium*: As an Asteraceae plant, allergens may cause photodermatitis-like reactions; caution is advised in patients with photosensitive dermatitis.

### 4.2 Herbs with a Higher Potential for Allergic Reactions

In clinical practice, three herbs are relatively more likely to cause allergic reactions: *Dictamnus dasycarpus*, *Portulaca oleracea*, and *Taraxacum mongolicum*.

## 5. Dosage Adjustment for Sensitive Skin

The conventional external wash dosage for the aforementioned herbs is 20–30 g per herb. However, for sensitive skin, the dosage should be appropriately reduced (to 10–15 g) to minimize the risk of irritation. It is essential to decoct the herbs in purified water for 30 minutes, allow the decoction to cool completely, and then apply as a cold compress. Gauze is soaked in the solution

and applied as a wet compress for 15 minutes, twice a day. A skin allergy test on the postauricular area or inner forearm is recommended before the first use.

## 6. Pattern Differentiation-Based Herb Selection and Formula Construction Strategy Based on Skin Lesion Characteristics

The construction of external wash formulas for facial dermatitis should follow the principle of “first identifying the predominant symptom, then determining the herb category, and finally considering modifications.” For each pattern type, no more than three herbs should be used, and the entire formula should be kept within nine herbs to ensure conciseness and targeted action, and to reduce the risk of sensitization from excessive ingredients. The conventional dosage is 20–30 g per herb, reduced to 10–15 g for sensitive skin.

### 6.1 Predominantly Marked Facial Redness

This indicates internal accumulation of blood-heat; the treatment principle is to clear heat and cool blood. *Portulaca oleracea*, *Isatis indigotica*, and *Rehmannia glutinosa* can be selected. *Portulaca oleracea* clears heat, resolves toxins, and repairs the barrier; *Isatis indigotica* strongly cools blood and resolves macules; *Rehmannia glutinosa* cools blood without damaging *Yin*. The three herbs together achieve the effect of reducing redness.

### 6.2 Facial Redness with Mild Itching

In cases where blood heat and wind pathogen coexist, *Chrysanthemi Flos*, 20g, and *Saposhnikovia Radix*, 20 g, are added to the heat-clearing and blood-cooling prescription. *Chrysanthemum* disperses wind-heat from the head and face, while *Saposhnikovia*, as the moistening agent among wind herbs, dispels wind without damaging *Yin*.

### 6.3 Marked Itching or Presence of Exudation

This presents damp-heat syndrome accompanied by wind pathogen. The formula was supplemented with 20 g *Fructus Kochiae* and 20 g *Cortex Dictamni*. *Fructus Kochiae* eliminates dampness and dispels wind pathogen, while *Cortex Dictamni* clears internal damp-heat, expels external wind pathogen and effectively alleviates pruritus.

### 6.4 Externally Contracted Wind-Heat Triggering Flare-Up

Add *Lonicera japonica* 20 g and *Taraxacum mongolicum* 20 g. *Lonicera japonica* clears and outthrusts wind-heat; *Taraxacum mongolicum* reduces swelling-abscesses and dissipates nodules.

### 6.5 Impaired Facial Skin Barrier

Add *Bletilla striata*, *Astragalus membranaceus*, and *Dioscorea opposita*. *Bletilla striata* forms a film, locks in moisture, and engenders flesh; *Astragalus membranaceus* supplements *Qi* (A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the “life force”), secures the exterior, and strengthens the interstices; *Dioscorea opposita* engenders fluids and moistens the skin. When decocted together, these three can produce a gel-like consistency that better protects the damaged skin barrier.

## 6.6 Marked Dryness and Tightness Sensation

This indicates *Yin*-deficiency internal dryness. The formula was supplemented with *Bletilla striata*, *Polygonatum sibiricum* and *Cannabis sativa*. *Polygonatum sibiricum* nourishes *Yin* and provides deep-level nourishment; *Cannabis sativa* supplies oils to moisten dryness. Combined with *Bletilla striata*, one protects, one nourishes, and one moistens.

## 6.7 Dark Red Facial Erythema

Heat accumulation causes blood stasis. The heat-clearing prescription was supplemented with *Paeonia suffruticosa*. It cools blood without leaving stasis, invigorates blood without causing reckless flow, and excels at eliminating deep-lying heat in the blood aspect.

## 6.8 Red, Swollen Lesions Prone to Furuncles

This indicates exuberant heat-toxin. This combination of *Viola yedoensis* and *Lonicera japonica* exhibits potent effects in detoxification, nodule dissipation, and abscess relief.

## 7. Summary

Although facial dermatitis involves various Western medical diagnoses, TCM diagnosis emphasizes “inspecting the exterior to infer the interior,” using skin lesion manifestations as the guiding principle for pattern differentiation. Its core pathogenesis can be summarized as “blood-heat as the root, wind pathogen as the manifestation, and *Yin* damage as the transformation.” Internal accumulation of blood-heat drives reckless blood flow, manifesting externally as erythema and a burning sensation; wind pathogen lodges in the exterior, contending with *Qi* (A substance known in traditional Chinese medicine as the “life force”) and blood, thus causing pruritus; prolonged constraint of heat pathogen consumes and damages *Yin* fluid, depriving the skin and flesh of moisture, resulting in dryness, scaling, and a feeling of tightness. These three factors often coexist and interact; clinically, the predominant and secondary aspects of the skin lesions must be clearly identified to discern the emphasis of the pathogenesis. The essence of external treatment lies in the correspondence between the medicinals and the pattern. When constructing formulas, the principle of “first identifying the predominant symptom, then determining the herb category, and finally considering modifications” should be followed. First, inspect the skin lesions: if erythema and burning predominate, treat based on blood-heat. Commonly used external wash herbs are categorized into three groups: the heat-clearing, blood-cooling category, such as *Portulaca oleracea*, *Isatis indigotica*, *Rehmannia glutinosa*, *Paeonia suffruticosa*, and *Viola yedoensis*, clears blood-aspect stagnated heat to abate erythema and eliminate burning; Treatment is based on wind pathogen differentiation when pruritus serves as the predominant symptom. Wind-dispelling and itch-relieving herbs including the above species were selected in this study. These herbs dispel wind pathogen from the body surface to alleviate itching. For patients presenting with predominant dryness and cutaneous tightness, treatment was performed based on the pathogenesis of *Yin* impairment. Dryness-moistening and tissue-regenerating herbs were adopted in the treatment, including the above medicinal materials. They nourish *Yin* and moisten the skin to relieve dryness and consolidate the interstitial spaces. *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* harmonizes the whole formula and relieves spasm and acute discomfort. In clinical application, we prescribed a maximum of three herbs for each syndrome type and limited the total number of herbs in each formula to nine. This approach ensures concise composition and potent therapeutic effects, while preventing allergic reactions caused by excessive herbal ingredients. The formula was modified according to the

patients' accompanying symptoms. Wind-dispelling herbs were added to blood-cooling prescriptions, and heat-clearing herbs were incorporated into dryness-moistening formulas. We modified the formula based on accompanying symptoms by adding wind-dispelling herbs to blood-cooling prescriptions and incorporating heat-clearing herbs into dryness-moistening formulas. The herbal dosage was reduced for patients presenting with sensitive skin. Photosensitizing herbs were used with extreme caution, and retroauricular allergy testing was required before the administration of highly allergenic herbal ingredients.

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