



## Can Recurrent Furunculosis be Treated without the Use of Antibiotics?

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Furunculosis can be defined as the formation of abscesses, which accumulate pus and necrotic tissues, due to a hair follicle infection. Furunculosis is usually associated with the agent *Staphylococcus aureus*, although it may also be caused by other bacteria. The furuncles are usually swollen, red and tender nodules, which appear on hair-bearing parts of the body. Most of the treatments presented for recurrent furunculosis nowadays may be disappointing and many times not successful. In solitary lesions, incision and drainage may be sufficient, but many times, an antibiotic therapy is needed. Unfortunately, *S. aureus* can develop resistance to antibiotics. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) believes furunculosis is mostly caused by the invasion of Dampness and Heat. The treatment in TCM is intended to dissipate Heat and detoxify the body.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that recurrent furunculosis can be treated without the use of antibiotics.

**Methods:** Through the report of two clinical cases, both men, suffering from recurrent furunculosis, presented little improvement with the use of antibiotic therapy. Through earlier medical theories, such as TCM, methods for the energy balance of *Yin, Yang, Qi* and Blood were used, allied with Apex Ear Bloodletting for the withdrawal of Internal Heat, as well as dietary counseling.

**Results:** Both cases obtained a significant improvement with dietary counseling according to Traditional Chinese Medicine and Auricular acupuncture sessions associated with Apex Ear Bloodletting to eliminate the Internal Heat.

**Conclusion:** By reporting these two clinical cases, we can conclude that recurrent furunculosis can be treated without the use of antibiotics. Toward this goal, we must resort to earlier medical theories like TCM to treat the root of the problem, not only the symptom.

**Keywords:** Furunculosis; Antibiotics; Diet; Traditional Chinese Medicine; Acupuncture; Apex Ear Bloodletting; Galen; Hippocrates

### Introduction

Furunculosis can be defined as the formation of abscesses, which accumulate pus and necrotic tissues, due to a hair follicle infection. The Furunculosis is usually associated with the agent *Staphylococcus aureus*, although it may also be caused by other bacteria. The furuncles are usually swollen, red and tender nodules, which appear on hair-bearing parts of the body. The definition of recurrent furunculosis usually set as recurrent because of the presence of three or more crises within a year. Recurrent furunculosis is commonly caused by the colonization of *Staphylococcus aureus* on the anterior nares, but it might also occur in warm, moist parts of the skin. Examples would be behind the ears and in the groin. Other bacteria may also cause the disease, especially on the buttocks and the vaginal and perirectal area [1].

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), diseases come from the imbalances of the *Yin, Yang, Qi*, and Blood energies. The furuncle is caused by the formation of Humidity and Heat on the Blood.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate whether recurrent furunculosis can be treated without the use of antibiotics.

### Methods

The methods used were the description of two clinical cases.

**Case 1:** A 34-year-old male, R.F., who suffered from recurrent furunculosis. The patient started treatment with benzathine penicillin with a single dose every 21 days for a six-month period. After these six months, he stopped taking antibiotics and the furuncles

appeared insistently. The lesions and symptoms the patient suffered from appeared as a large red sore - swollen hair follicle, which was very painful for him and had three to four centimeters in diameter. He also suffered from hot flashes, light fever in the evening, pus coming from the wounds and day and night hyperhidrosis. The places where the disease spread were the crotch, buttocks, hand, knees and left hip. The patient was instructed to avoid all foods that had hot energy according to Traditional Chinese Medicine, such as

fried foods, egg, chocolate, honey, coconut, alcoholic beverages, dairy products, especially if the cheese is melted. In addition, the patient was instructed to avoid pepper, cinnamon, cloves and ginger.

Auricular acupuncture sessions were performed with Apex Ear Bloodletting (Figure 1) to remove the Internal Heat that was generating the furuncle symptoms according to Traditional Chinese Medicine.

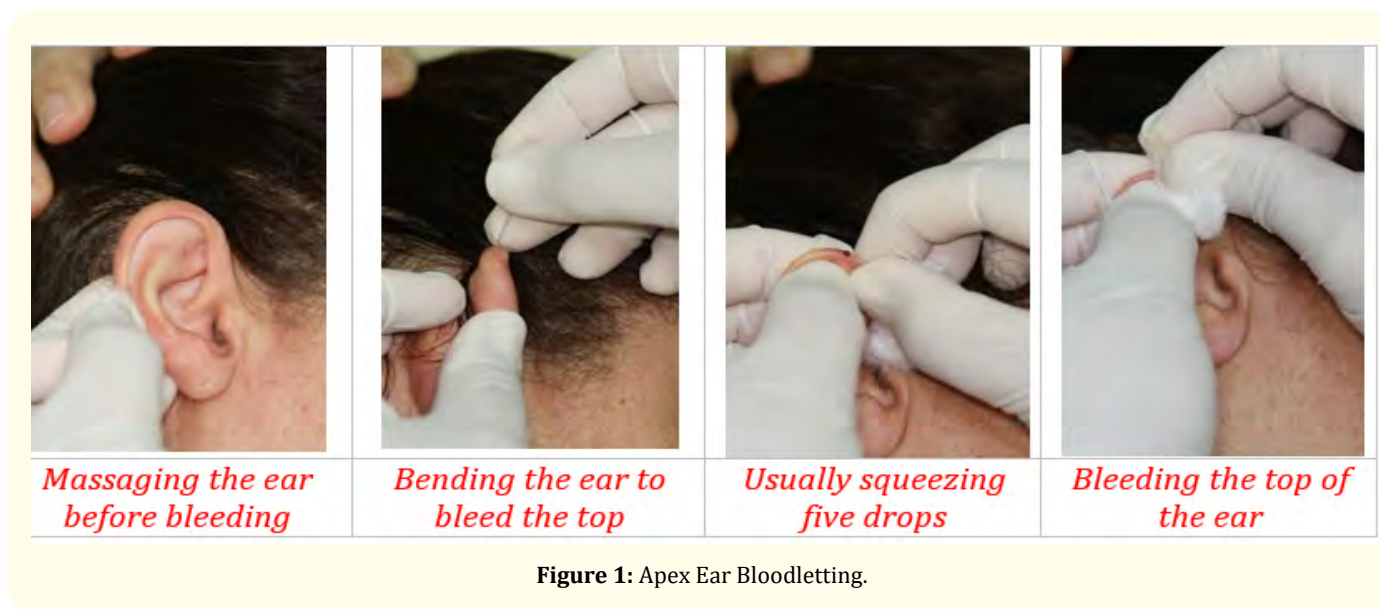


Figure 1: Apex Ear Bloodletting.

In addition, a Chinese herbal medicine called Long Dan Xie Gan Tang had also been associated, which is recommended for the treatment of patients who have Internal Heat according to TCM.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, another method for better comprehension of the pathologies and imbalances inside the human body is the tongue diagnosis. In the case of this specific patient, the tongue was reddish, meaning Internal Heat Retention (Figure 2.1). After the first session of auricular acupuncture, the color changed to pink (Figure 2.2). This means that there was less Internal Heat Retention after the first session of Auricular acupuncture.

**Case 2:** In May/2017, a 16-year-old male, started to present a case of recurrent furunculosis. He started treatment with dermatologists that prescribed several antibiotics, and then he decided to quit his medication because, as he said, “the stomach pain was enormous, because such strong medicines cannot come without any painful side effects”.

Several times the patient was taken to the emergency room to get abscess removal surgery, then only a short time later, the disease appeared once again in the same place. On September 12, 2017, he had a pilonidal cyst removed, one very deep ingrown hair, and after this surgery, he was debilitated for four months.

Three months after the surgery, he sought a medical infectologist who had a background in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The doctor advised him that this case was related to inadequate food habits, emotional distress and some external factors.

The doctor advised him to avoid all dairy products, especially melted cheese, such as in pizza, lasagna and cheese bread, which are very common foods in Brazilian cuisine. In addition, the doctor advised that he should avoid fried foods, eggs, chocolate, honey, coconut and all alcoholic beverages. The physician also pointed out, finally, that one of the causes why his furunculosis kept coming back even within the antibiotic treatment was associated to his eating habits, that were making his condition worse. The doctor orientated that he should not ingest cold liquids, even water. To



**Figure 2.1:** Red tongue – before acupuncture treatment



**Figure 2.2:** Result - after one session of acupuncture.

the patient's surprise all these eating factors were common to him, especially the ingestion of cow's milk, which he drank directly from his own cow after milking, as the patient's parents were farmers. The cold-water factor was very surprising information for the patient as well, because of his daily habit of drinking extremely cold water.

In addition to dietary counseling to avoid warm or hot energy foods, the patient underwent a few auricular acupuncture sessions twice a week, the most important procedure being the Apex Ear Bloodletting to withdraw excessive internal Heat responsible for symptoms of furunculosis, as shown on figure 1.

Auricular points (Figure 3) were also used. The use of the auricular points should be done in conjunction with the Apex Ear Bloodletting on the top of the ear, taking out 5 drops of blood. Without the Apex Ear Bloodletting the condition could worsen, even with the use of the Auricular points, because when the patient has Internal Heat generated by energy deficiencies, if the Internal Heat is not removed first and after tone the energy deficiencies, more Internal Heat can be produced and consequently worsen the furuncles symptoms.



- Shen men (1)*
- Neurasthenia (2)*
- Anxious (3)*
- Occiput (4)*
- Liver (5)*
- Gall Bladder (6)*
- Kidney (7)*
- Spleen (8)*
- Large Intestine (9)*
- Heart (10)*
- Lung (11)*
- Apex Ear Bloodletting point (12)*

**Figure 3:** Auricular acupuncture points used in the furunculosis treatment.

## Results

The first patient presented a complete healing of all the lesions, with a significant improvement of the affected areas, only using dietary counseling, Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture sessions. Topical or systemic antibiotics were not used at any time.

The second patient, after a few auricular acupuncture twice-a-week sessions with the Apex Ear Bloodletting procedure, associated with dietary counseling, presented a significant improvement of the lesions with almost complete regression of them. The lesion in the buttocks area or coccyx post-withdrawal of pilonidal cyst, which was previously draining a light yellow liquid, had significantly improved with the treatment, with no more secretion in the affected area.

## Discussion

Furunculosis is usually associated with hair-bearing areas of the body, parts which might experience friction or sweat. Examples would be neck, thighs and armpits. Although it occurs more commonly in certain areas, it might occur in any part of the skin.

The main symptom of a furuncle is a painful, red bump. It can start as the size of a pea, and the skin will swell and turn red around it. Within a few days, the bump could increase in size and fill with pus. Then it could develop a yellow-white tip that will eventually burst, allowing the pus to drain out.

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a type of bacteria which might be commonly found on the skin and inside the nose. It is the main bacteria which may cause furunculosis. The bacterium takes advantage of easy entries on the body, such as small injuries or insect bites [2].

Most of the treatments presented for recurrent furunculosis nowadays may be unsuccessful and many times ineffective [3].

Treatment with antibiotics is prescribed, first, when the furuncles are recurrent (more than three appearances within a year) also when they are localized in the upper part of the trunk or on the head. As the bacteria can develop resistance to the medication, many patients are treated with a microbiological examination of the inflammatory focus, in order to examine the contents, and then better prescribe a specific drug, with the pathogen determined, helping to reveal its sensitivity to different types of antibiotics.

One to six different names of antibiotics may be recommended for the treatment, and sometimes, antibiotics for multidrug-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) are also used.

For example, Lincomycin begins to fight the infection 2 - 4 hours after oral administration. It can counteract many types of bacteria. It is commonly used to treat diseases associated with the skin and soft tissues, as in wounds, abscesses and furunculosis itself.

## Western and Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspectives

The figure of the tree (Figure 4), is a good representation showing differences between Western Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine. The parts of the tree such as the trunk, branches, and leaves are visible to the naked eye and represent the performance of current Western Medicine. Each branch represents each specialty in Western Medicine, and each leaf coming from its specific branch represents each symptom of each specialty. The part of the tree that is below the earth, invisible to the naked eye, shows the root where in this drawing, represents the theory of the Five Elements and *Yin and Yang*.

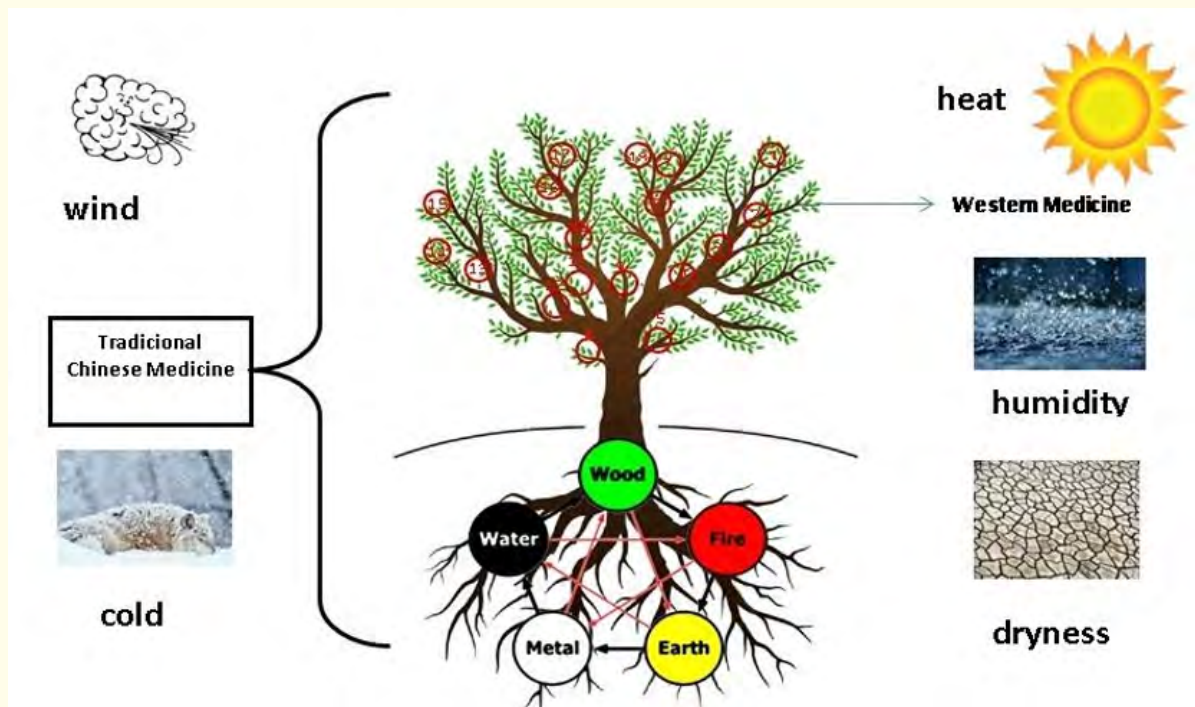
In Traditional Chinese Medicine, different diseases may be treated by the same method because of the occurrence of the same pathogenesis in their development.

The treatment for furunculosis in Western Medicine is based on the treatment of the symptom, therefore, represented by the leaf of the tree on the branch corresponding to the specialty of dermatology or infectology, using antibiotics as shown above in this study. Traditional Chinese Medicine, however, has the main goal of treating the root of the problem, correcting the energy imbalances of *Yin, Yang, Qi*, Blood and Heat retention, and therefore, not treating only the problem presented by the patient, in this case, furunculosis, but treating also all the diseases of the patient, physical and emotional.

## Galen

The main basis of Western Medicine is associated with the Greek physician, Galen, who lived 500 years after Hippocrates, and wrote theories about the functioning of the human body, which were implanted in almost all medical colleges of the West.

His theories showed the human being as divided into parts and each part is self-sufficient and works separately from the others.



**Figure 4:** Schematic drawing of the views of Western Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

From the model presented by Galen, where each organ or specialties are isolated, working independently, it is difficult to see the human being as a whole.

**Hippocrates**

According to Hippocrates, father of Western Medicine, the body must always be seen as a whole, and not as separated parts, as Galen had defended. Hippocrates believed that the organs had interdependent functioning, which needed to work together as a whole to achieve balance and health [4].

According to him, the diseases were supposed to be seen as a natural process. The importance of the physician was to increase the natural resistance of the body in order to help the body itself to overcome the imbalance of the metabolism and restore harmony, as the diseases had been caused by natural reactions within the body [5].

Hippocrates said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food" (A.K. Samanta; Natasha Jayapal; S. Senani, A.P. Kolte; Manpal Sridhar, 2013) [5].

**Yin and Yang**

*Yin* and *Yang* (Figure 5) are part of the fundamental concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as they are the main basis of all diagnosis and treatments. The earliest reference to *Yin* and *Yang* are in the *I Ching* in approximately 700 BC. Everything can be reduced to *Yin* and *Yang*.

As *Yin* and *Yang* represent balance, they are complementary. Everything is a bit *Yin* and a bit *Yang*, and nothing can be *Yin* or *Yang* in its totality. When the total *Yin* is achieved, the *Yang* part begins to expand. The *Yin* is contained in the *Yang*, and the opposite is also true. They are also constantly transforming into their opposite form, continually changing. When they are out of balance, they will affect each other, weakening the other's energy [6]. In order to be healthy, we aim for a state of equilibrium between the *Yin* and *Yang* energies.

**Relationship between Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang**

The whole functioning of the body is ruled by the flow of energy of *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi*, and Blood (Figure 6).

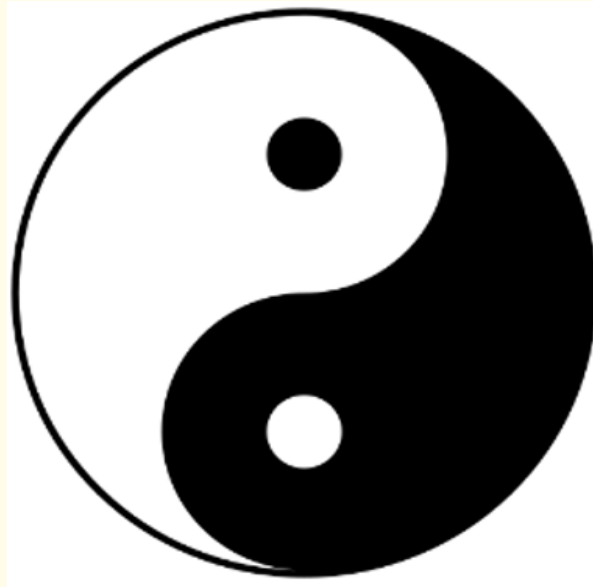


Figure 5: Yin-Yang.

This theory was presented by the author in 2015 at an Acupuncture Research Conference at Harvard Medical School, in Boston, USA. The overview of this study says that if we treat these energy imbalances, we will treat all the symptoms of the patient at the same time, even if the doctor does not know that the patient has such a symptom. With this line of reasoning, we will be able to treat all diseases of all specialties at the same time, as we treat in this case, the root of the problems and not only the symptoms.

When the decrease or increase of some of these energies occur, the formation of internal Heat can happen. In the case of furunculosis, there is the formation of Heat in the Blood. In TCM, Blood is responsible for nourishing the body. It carries away unwanted matter, replacing it with new, healthier tissues. The ways of eliminating the excess Heat produced by the circumstances that generated the Heat, such as emotions, food, energy deficiency, etc. can be through feces, urine, perspiration, nosebleed, prolonged menstruation, etc [7].

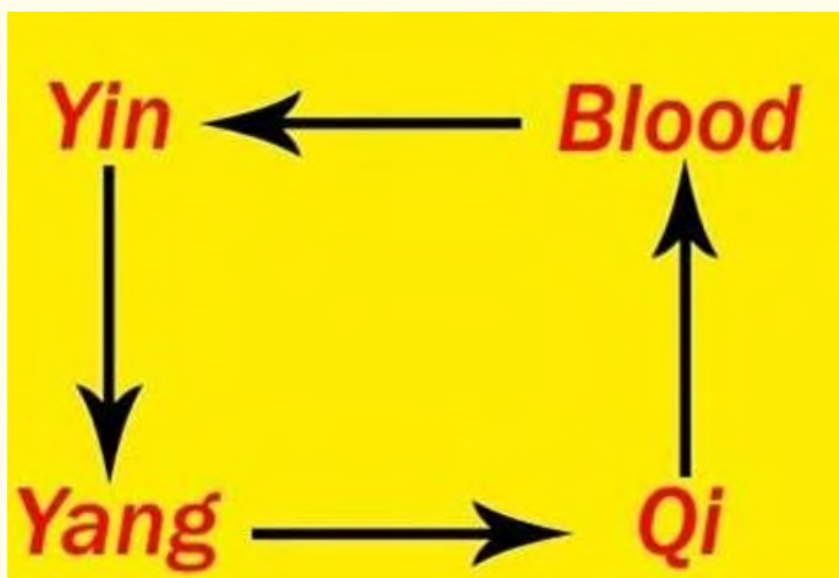


Figure 6: Schematic Relationship Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang.

In addition, the body can also try to eliminate Heat through increased bowel movement, increased desire to drink liquids; and in the most severe cases where the deepening of the Heat occurs, can generate symptoms of anxiety, irritability, mania and insomnia [7].

The furunculous lesion when it is reddish is a symptom that the body is retaining Internal Heat. The internal Heat may come from excess *Yang* energy or deficiency from other energies, such as Blood depletion and or *Yin*, which can also come from an inadequate diet, deficiency of energy or emotional issues such as anger.

### Acupuncture

Acupuncture has been part of the Chinese health care system for more than 2,500 years ago. According to TCM, there are energy flow patterns, denominated *Qi*, which are totally essential for health. All diseases are associated with different perturbations of the energy's flow. The main role of acupuncture, then, is to correct these imbalances or perturbations in the flow of this energy, using points close to the skin [8].

### Auricular Acupuncture

Auricular acupuncture aims to diagnose and treat any kind of medical condition in different areas of the body. It is based on the stimulation of the acupuncture points above mentioned, on the external ear surface.

The theory which underpins the use of Auricular acupuncture connects with the brain map discoveries made by the Canadian neuroscientist Wilder Penfield. This physician defends the idea of a map of the body existing on the surface of the brain, on the sensory cortex. This "map" projects on different areas of the body, creating microsystems, in this case, particularly concentrated on the ear.

Acupuncture developed mainly in Asian medicine, however, auricular acupuncture evolved in Western Europe. The French doctor, Paul Nogier, a neurologist who worked in the 1950's, was responsible for its foundations, which was then expanded by Frank Bahr, and grew during the following decades through the work of other medical specialists in Germany [9].

The ear map has the form of an inverted fetus, and it has the representations of the anatomical and emotional bodies. The ear tissue has other functions besides the hearing sense [9].

The ear develops first, and it has its full size and functioning forming in about 18 weeks of pregnancy, and it is composed of the three primary anatomical structures, which are endoderm, mesoderm and ectoderm [9].

### Apex Ear Bloodletting

Apex Ear Bloodletting is based on the medicine proposed by Hippocrates. The physician believed in the Theory of the Four Humors, associating the four basic elements (Air, Fire, Earth and Water) with the four basic humors of the human body: blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm [7].

Bloodletting started being practiced around 3000 years ago in Egypt. The practice was continued by the Arabs, Asians, Greeks and Romans, and spread through Europe in the middle ages. Its peak was during the 19th century, and after that, it almost stopped being practiced in Western Medicine. However, it is still being used in some traditions, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine [7].

Nowadays, the practice is done on the ear apex, or the top of the ear, and it can treat many different conditions.

According to TCM, the procedure discharges the Heat from the body, relaxing tension and relieving pain, and in this study, we are using the Apex Ear Bloodletting to release the Heat in order to treat furunculosis, which is caused by Heat retention [7].

### The Arndt-Schultz's Law

The Arndt-Schultz's law (Figure 7), originally formulated in 1888, helps to better understand the effects of different drug concentrations on an individual. The rule states that for all substances, small doses stimulate, moderate doses inhibit and overdoses kill. According to this law, highly diluted drugs improve organic processes, while high concentrations harm health. This hypothesis curiously coincides with homeopathic theory. Currently, Maturana and Varela, two Chilean researchers, have proved this and much regarding the sizes of doses in the role of stimulating or inhibiting the vitalities of living beings" [10]. In the case of using antibiotics for the treatment of furunculosis, as they are highly-concentrated drugs, they can cause reduction of the vital energy of the patient, leading to the formation of more Internal Heat according to TCM.

### Chinese Nutrition

Humans need to acquire nutrients from food to survive and it is also the kind of diet, classified by the different kind of energies that will determine the health, depending on the energy condition of each person.

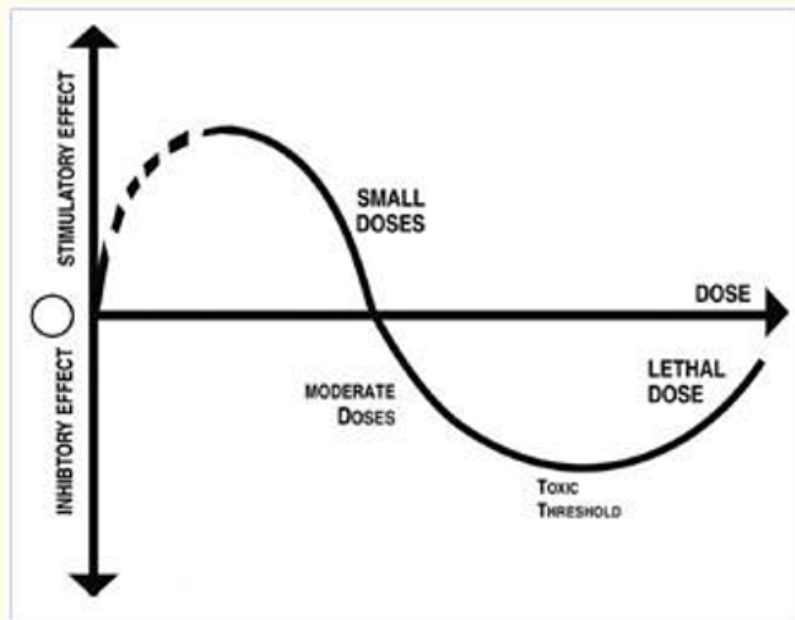


Figure 7: The Arndt-Schultz's Law.

In Chinese culture and in Chinese medicine, food is seen as therapy. What is put inside the body has the main goal of harmonizing it, and helping to balance the *Yin* and *Yang*. In summary, it will influence well-being. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the foods are divided into four categories, the neutral ones, the heating ones, the warm ones and the cooling ones. Every person, depending on his harmony condition, shows a tendency to consume foods that would imbalance more his condition. Therefore, if the patient has a tendency of being cold, then hot, warm or neutral foods would be recommended, such as cooked grains and hot peppers, and avoid raw foods [11].

Furunculosis, according to TCM, is associated with the Energy Dysfunction of the Spleen Pancreas. The main cause of it is related to the fact that the Spleen is the easiest organ to be attacked by Dampness. As we saw above, furuncles usually appear in places which receive more sweat or humidity. According to TCM, external factors have a deep influence in the well-being of the body, and factors such as living in a damp house, wearing wet clothes or diving into water for a long time, and even consuming cold foods, such as raw vegetables and fruits, can create an energy imbalance in the Spleen-Pancreas. Once the Spleen is weakened the Dampness comes and digestive problems might appear [12].

Spleen-*Qi* is responsible for the transport of Food-*Qi* to the body. If the Spleen-*Qi* is weakened the main symptoms might be feeling tired, or not feeling hunger. When Spleen-*Yang-Qi* is deficient, the patient might feel cold in the extremities, such as the feet and nose.

Foods that cause phlegm formation are those that cause imbalance in the energy of the Spleen-Pancreas, which are all dairy products, cold beverages, sweets, and raw food. Patients who are regularly excessively worried are also more propitious to phlegm formation. According to TCM, dairy product consumption is able to weaken the Spleen-Pancreas, increasing the production of phlegm. Dairy products are a large part of most Western diets, and the main basis for nutrition. They might lead to retention of mucus throughout the body. This situation can lead to the production of secretion in the furunculosis.

In the case of the first patient, he was generating Heat inside the body, because he had other energy deficiencies, which were causing, in his case, the symptoms, of Hot flashes (Kidney-*Yin* deficiency), and hyperhidrosis (*Qi* deficiency). Besides the patient's consumption of food, which generates internal Heat, such as, chocolate, fries, melted cheese, etc., he was also using high-concentration medicine such as the antibiotics, that according to the Arndt-Schultz Law cause a reduction of the vital energy, creating afterwards, according to TCM, the formation of Internal Heat, which had been causing the recurrent furunculosis symptoms.



In the case of the second patient, he was generating Internal Heat for two reasons: first that he liked to eat all the foods that we had previously discussed that generate Internal Heat, such as chocolate, fried foods, melted cheese, lots of milk, etc. In addition, he liked to drink very cold water, sometimes putting water inside the freezer.

This Western custom of drinking ice water causes a deficiency in the energy of the Spleen-pancreas, resulting in a decrease in the absorption of nutrients, and in this way, leading to a lower blood production, later causing the formation of Heat, which in this case, manifested as recurrent furunculosis.

In relation to water temperature, the difference between drinking water at warm temperatures instead of drinking water at room temperature or cold water is that the energy of the water is normally cold. If we drink this water constantly, we will weaken the energy of the Spleen and Pancreas, which are responsible for the absorption of nutrients, as well as maintaining the blood in the vessels [13]. This weakening could lead to Blood deficiency, which in the Western tradition is diagnosed as anemia. However, in the beginning, this Blood deficiency could go undetected in laboratory exams, yet the patient could be suffering from anemia.

Therefore, warm water is better, because it cannot induce this disharmony in the Spleen-Pancreas, helping the absorption of nutrients, and consequently, avoiding Blood deficiency, and not causing internal Heat formation, which can cause furunculosis symptoms [14-21].

## Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that we can treat recurrent furunculosis without the use of antibiotics. The most important therapeutic measure is to obtain the balance of the *Yin, Yang, Qi* and Blood energies, in addition to performing the withdrawal of the Internal Heat formation through, in this study, the Apex Ear Bloodletting, also associated with dietary counseling. Seeing the patient in a holistic way and considering all of his/her energy, nutritional, environmental and emotional factors, Traditional Chinese Medicine finds a way to cure without drugs. This approach is taken according to the Arndt Shultz's Law, that explains that highly-concentrated medication induces the reduction of the vital energy, increasing the chance to also induce the formation of Internal Heat. This reasoning which exemplifies the main point in this article is based on Hippocrates affirmation, that natural forces are the true healers of a disease.

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