Morning Sickness

Biomedical Perspective
A woman’s body requires GnRH (gonadotropin-releasing hormone) in order to begin the ovulation cycle. The pituitary gland releases lutenizing hormone or LH as well as FSH (follicle stimulating hormone) which promotes the development of the ovarian follicle that contains an egg (which we shall assume is viable since this is a discussion about morning sickness in pregnancy).

FSH acts upon the ovary to continue the growth and development of the follicle. Within this follicle FSH promotes the production of estrogen which in turn causes a mid-cycle surge of LH (lutenizing hormone), stimulating ovulation. The follicle ruptures during ovulation and releases and egg (or oocyte) which, in a perfect world, is picked up by the fallopian tubes.

If the egg is then fertilized while it is in the fallopian tube, it begins cellular division and migrates down the fallopian tube to the uterus within the first 4 days or so after fertilization has occurred. The fertilized egg which now is classified as an embryo, dividing and growing like mad, then implants into the wall of the uterus to continue it’s development into a fetus. This implantation process also stimulates the growth of the placenta.

Within the first month or so of this process…badda boom, badda bing….morning sickness for about ½ of all pregnant women. The symptoms of morning sickness are nausea and vomiting mostly in the morning, though a lucky few do experience it all day long. This is often the earliest sign of pregnancy. (The Virgin Mary probably thought she had the flu. What a shocker!) The term is of ancient Egyptian origin first noted around 2000 BC. About ½ of pregnant women will suffer from morning sickness especially if the following happen to be true:

- First time pregnancy
- Women under 20 years old
- Obese pregnant women (over 170lbs)
- Pregnant with twins
- Non-smoking pregnant women…and shouldn’t they all be?

The intensity and duration of morning sickness is related to pre-existent digestive dysfunction. Morning sickness may begin as early as the 1st month and generally subsides by the end of the 12th week.

According to western medicine there are 3 hypotheses regarding the mechanism causing morning sickness:

1) Elevated levels of human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG)
2) Ration between HCG and estrogen
3) Corpus luteum in ovary – elevated corpus luteum in the right ovary.

Another source I read suggests the culprit may be progesterone production from the corpus luteum, which is the follicle from which the egg was expelled. Progesterone maintains the lining of the uterus and signals the ovaries to stop releasing eggs, thus stopping the monthly periods.

Another possible cause for morning sickness is an enhanced sensitivity to smell which can trigger the gag reflex.

Treatment from a biomedical perspective includes avoiding medications, eating small meals before feeling the hunger and eating a balanced diet, avoiding excessively spicy or pungent foods. Another currently popular bit of advice encourages women to eat a couple of dry crackers before getting up from bed.

Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspective

Morning sickness in Chinese is called “Ren shen e zu”

Etiology

Well…. *Pregnancy!* But technically, it’s pregnancy with *Qi disturbance* and *Blood nourishment*.

You should be aware of the physiological changes associated with pregnancy which will quickly clue you in to an assessment that your patient may well have morning sickness:

- **Cessation of menses** – a type of physiological amenorrhea
  - Your patient’s periods may have stopped or she may have missed a period.
- **Food cravings** – often for specific foods, sour, sweet, salty, etc.
  - (My sister craved onions and lemons. Go figure.)
- **Fatigue, palpitations, dizziness**
- **An increase in urination frequency.**
- **Temporary sciatic pain**
- **Breast tenderness and nipples getting darker**
- **A heavy sensation**
- **Low back pain or weakness**

Mechanism

The mechanism of morning sickness in TCM is

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Middle Jiao disorder + Blood Deficiency
leading to rebellious Stomach Qi and Chong Qi
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While Qi rebellion is an excess, morning is primarily a problem of more deficiency and the excess in this syndrome is relative.
Let’s look at why this happens…and note that it all comes down to (from really) Blood Deficiency:

There are 3 chambers of blood in the female body: Liver, Uterus and the Chong Channel. The Spleen/Stomach (at ST 30), Liver and Uterus are all connected by the Chong Channel.

A fetus is itself pure Yin in nature and full of blood, continuing to need more blood as it grows. As a result:

1) When a woman is first pregnant there is a temporary Blood xu in the uterus. Women are either anemic or borderline anemic. The menses and bleeding stops in order to nourish the fetus. Fatigue can be very evident at this stage.

2) Blood from the cessation of menses is not enough as the fetus continues to grow. More blood is transferred from Liver to Uterus and can lead to general blood deficiency signs such as:
   a. Pale nails
   b. Dizziness
   c. Blurred vision

   Cravings for sour foods, which astringe the Liver to hold Blood, or for sweet foods to tonify the Spleen which is the source for Blood will manifest at this stage. Any sweet/sour foods will nourish the blood…which I’m guessing is probably why my sister, after a lifetime of hating it, began to crave lemonade when she got pregnant.

3) As the fetus continues to grow even more blood is needed. This takes more blood away from the Chong Channel, the “Sea of Blood.” In an optimal world, Qi and Blood should be balanced. Now, however, Qi and blood are out of balance. Blood from the Chong goes to the Uterus to nourish the baby resulting and a relative excess of Qi, or Qi that is not rooted, in the Chong.

   And here’s the key:
   Qi rebels upward through the connection of the Chong to the Stomach channel (ST 30). This causes a rebellion of Stomach Qi leading to the nausea and vomiting symptoms!

Recall, please that one of the indications we learned in Energetics for the Chong channel was the “adverse flow of Qi in the abdomen and chest.”
Additionally, per the Chinese clock, the 7 – 9 am hours are those times when the Stomach Qi is relatively strong. When the stomach Qi is rebellious in these hours due to the rebellious Chong Qi, the symptoms can thus be worse in the morning.

To reduce morning sickness symptoms, a pregnant woman can avoid pungent and spicy foods. These foods as well as burning incense can cause the fetus to be restless within the body exacerbating the symptoms. From a treatment perspective, don’t move Qi or blood and avoid descending too much during pregnancy to keep the fetus calm and stable.

**Differential Diagnosis and Treatment**

The treatment for morning sickness is to
- Avoid medication
- Watch the diet – no spicy, greasy, pungent foods
- Use the basic and differential points below.

**Basic Points for Morning Sickness (Ren shen e zu)**

Puncture and stimulate using an even method with *no sedation*. Use 34 or 36 gauge needles only.

Please note that these points are good for *all* stomach disorders including gastritis and so forth. Know and love them!

- **P-6**
  You can also check out Zheng Zeng’s notes here. Go to page 4-5 for the Pericardium 6 discussion.

- **Ren 12**
  Note that this only applies for the first 3 months of pregnancy. As a rule of thumb, do not puncture Ren 12 after the 5th month of pregnancy. The fundus (see page 16 of site link) has moved upward past this point and you do not want to puncture now. Check out Zheng Zeng’s notes for Ren 12. See page 4.

- **ST 36**
  Oh, how Zheng Zeng loves this point! See pages 3 – 6 of this link to read all about it again.

**Forbidden Points for Pregnancy**

Points on the lower abdomen and lower back, below the level of the umbilicus and 1st Lumbar vertebra are forbidden for pregnancy. Do not use Jing Well points after the 3rd month.

- **LI 4**
  You can use LI 4 alone on occasion for wind invasions, however, this point moves a lot of qi and can cause the uterus to contract, really pissing off the fetus. It also moves blood really well and this is not good for retention of a fetus either.

As a matter of fact, LI 4 and SP6 in combination are often used to help expel the placenta after childbirth (tonify on LI 4 and reduce on SP 6). Some sources say it is used to induce abortion.

[Click here to read Zheng Zeng’s notes](#) on this subject. Go to page 7 for the discussion.
The same info found in the LI 4 bullet point applies regarding the LI 4 + SP 6 combination. SP 6 causes the uterus to contract and is said to induce labor. Read the full Zheng Zeng discussion here. Pages 6-7.

GB 21
See the top of page 7 for the GB 21 link above. This point has a function for descending the Qi which is not good in the event you want to retain the fetus during pregnancy. This point is also used to expel a placenta that is retained abnormally after delivery of a baby, but the LI 4 + SP 6 combination is used more frequently.

Liver Qi Stagnation
This is an excess reason for morning sickness. Aka, Liver overacting on Spleen. This is also expressed as “disharmony between the Liver and the Middle Jiao/Warmer.” Basically, this is a temporary Liver Qi stagnation with gas and bloating caused by the resultant Spleen Qi Deficiency as the Liver is overacting on the Spleen.

Symptoms are found in the first column below and treatment principles and points are found in the right column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Treatment Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Emotional swings, irritability, easy to anger, stress, depression</td>
<td>Soothe Liver Qi; Strengthen MJ; Regulate Spleen &amp; Stomach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Breast tenderness; hypochondriac pain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Morning vomiting; acid regurgitation; belching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gas/bloating; hiccup; vomiting sour fluids</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decreased appetite; fatigue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Crave sour and sweet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- (Blurred vision, floaters)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T: Normal [or pale body, or red tip, red spots on sides]  
C: Thin, white  
P: Wiry [without strength or (Slippery—Pregnancy)]

Basic points +
GB-34: LIV-13; UB-18, 20, 21
Do not use 4 gates!

May add:
LIV-3, 8; UB-17, 18, 20, 21 – only in 1st 3 months

> Su Ye Huang Lian Tang (zi su ye 6g; huang lian 3g) – 10 bags. 1 bag/day; take 5-8x/day \( \rightarrow \) stops vomiting/awaken SP & ST

(see next page)
Spleen and Stomach Deficiency/Middle Jiao Disorder
This is a reason of deficiency for morning sickness. Specifically, this is SP/ST Xu with a Chong Xu. This is caused by the baby blocking the flow of qi which causes the deficiency.

Symptoms are found in the column on the left while treatment principles and points are found on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Treatment Principles and Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Nausea &amp; vomiting, worse in the morning, off/on</td>
<td><strong>Tonify SP Qi; Descend Rebellious ST Qi; Regulate MJ; Stop Nausea &amp; Vomiting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fatigue; decreased or poor appetite</td>
<td><strong>Basic points +</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Drowsy/sleepy; pale face</td>
<td>UB-20, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gas and bloating; vomiting out stomach contents or sour fluid (vomiting of undigested food right after eating when severe)</td>
<td>SP-9, 3, (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loose stool or diarrhea</td>
<td>&gt; <strong>Su Ye Huang Lian Tang</strong> (zi su ye 6g; huang lian 3g) – 10 bags. 1 bag/day. take 5-8x/day → stops vomiting/awaken SP &amp; ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May have prolapsed sensation in lower abdomen</td>
<td>&gt; <strong>Xiang Sha Liu Jin Zi Tang</strong> (Si Jun Zi Tang + chen pi + ban xia = Liu Jin Zi Tang + sha ren. mu xiang)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Typical Blood Xu Sx: pale face, poor memory, palpitations, dizziness, bad concentration, dream-disturbed sleep</td>
<td><strong>[especially in right middle position]</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes on Miscarriage
If there is a severe sinking sensation in the lower abdomen, this may be an indication of miscarriage. Any bleeding or spotting with lower back pain is a Kidney deficiency and is an even worse sign. If you see early signs, raise the Spleen Qi (Spleen Qi xu) and tonify the Kidney Qi.

You can use **Tai Shan Pan Shi Jian** during the 1st trimester of pregnancy to strengthen Kidney Qi in the event of deficiency. If there is an organ prolapse due to Spleen Qi Xu use **Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang** formula.

If you suspect your patient has had a miscarriage, check the pulses. The pulse will often be very very deep and weak on one side, but still slippery on the other. This indicates miscarriage, but with some retention of fetal tissues.
Nausea and Vomiting (ou tu)

Biomedical Perspective

By definition nausea is an unpleasant feeling that may include dizziness, vague discomfort in the stomach/abdomen, and unwillingness to eat and a feeling that one needs to vomit. Vomiting is the forceful contraction of the stomach which propels the contents upwards into the esophagus and out through the mouth.

Pregnant women and those who suffer easily from motion sickness are the most susceptible to nausea and vomiting. This of course does not take into account alcohol and drug induced vomiting, nor vomiting as a symptom of disease, heat stroke, cardiac infarction, etc. There is a vomiting center in the brain, CTZ, a chemoreceptor trigger zone, which is activated and results in vomiting.

Symptoms include, in this order:

1) Retching
   This begins from deep inspiration: the glottis is closed, the esophagus distended and intrathoracic pressure falls. Simultaneous to this, strong abdominal contracts occur leading to spasms of the duodenum and antrum of the stomach as well as reverse/retrograde peristalsis forcing the chyme in the stomach upwards. Due to the spasms, however, the upper esophageal sphincter remains closed and the chyme falls back down into the stomach. With subsequent spasms the chyme moves upward and downward repeatedly until the stomach is full.

   (Chyme is a thick liquid made up of partially digested food and stomach juices which has been processed by the stomach. Under normal circumstances the chyme passes through the stomach’s pyloric valve – at the bottom of the stomach – and into the duodenum, the upper portion of the small intestine…it’s not supposed to go back into the stomach!)

2) Vomiting
   When the stomach is full after step 1, it forces the diaphragm upward into the thoracic cavity. This pressure from the upward pushing energy eventually forces the upper esophageal sphincter to open and some of the stomach contents to be released. Vomiting repeats until all stomach contents are released. Sometimes even bile is expelled. This does not taste pretty!

3) Sympathetic nerve discharge causes the following symptoms:
   a. Tachycardia
   b. Tachypnea
   c. Sweating

Treatment
Recognize that this is a protective function of the body! This expels bacteria and toxins such as in the cases of Stomach flu and food poisoning. If this is what’s going on, let the vomiting happen rather than trying to quell it. That said, ensure the patient has sufficient fluid intake. If vomiting is really severe western medicine will sometimes use tranquilizers to calm the activity causing vomiting in the brain.
Once upon a time I was an ER tech, low enough on the totem pole that I had to work holidays. Regularly on Thanksgiving and Christmas afternoons whole families would come in having given themselves food poisoning by cooking the turkey at an insufficient temperature in an effort to get it just a little moister. They’d show up all dehydrated and looking like hell. We’d give them a shot of Compazine to reduce their nausea for a couple of hours, pat ‘em on their sweaty little heads, and give them fluids to drink. (This was in the dark ages folks, we didn’t do drip IV’s just for the sheer hell of it then.) We’d encourage them to get themselves home before the Compazine wore off, drink plenty of liquids in spite of the vomiting and continue throw up the toxins they’d just enjoyed at the holiday table.

Moral to the tale: If you’re cooking a bird for the holidays, make sure the internal temperature the turkey is 180 ° F…some sources say 165 °, but having seen these poor self-poisoned folks, I’d recommend the higher number!

Now isn’t that a festive little story?

Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspective

Etiology

1) **Irregular diet**
   This includes bad food and unclean food. See the relatively pointless little sidebar above!

2) **Medication** and antibiotics
   You hear this on TV when the pharmaceutical commercials give the blazing fast side effect disclaimers, i.e., “side effects may include nausea, vomiting, bleeding from the ears, crack addiction, and suicide.”

3) **Emotional disorder**
   This includes Liver Qi stagnation and anxiety. Reverse Qi disorder can occur in the Stomach (acid regurgitation, vomiting), Lung (includes wheezing and coughing), and Liver (comes with headache, irritation, etc.)

4) **External pathogens**
   **Damp cold**, damp heat and just plain old dampness as in the case of Stomach flu. The three basic methods for removing dampness are sweating, vomiting and purging. You can actually remove a pathogen through **diarrhea**, especially if the pathogen is **damp cold**. **Damp heat** is often expelled by **vomiting**.
Mechanism

The mechanism of nausea and vomiting, per TCM is:

Middle jiao disorder resulting in rebellious Stomach Qi

Note that morning sickness, by contrast, will also have a rebellion of Chong Qi... and of course, comes coupled with pregnancy. So if your patient is a dude, you can instantly weed that option out of the possible mechanisms!

There are a couple of types of vomiting to be aware of which are found in the Fuyiu Yip book.

1) “Ou” or vomiting with sound and with expulsion of food.
   This is an excess. This is rebellious Stomach Qi or Qi disorder with Food Stagnation. Any sound is a rebellion of Qi in this case. This is a disharmony between the Liver and the Stomach.

2) “Tu” or vomiting with food, but without sound.
   This is more food stagnation, but less rebellious Stomach Qi, as there is no sound. This too is an excess.

3) “Gan ou” or vomiting with sound, but without food expulsion.
   This is more rebellious Stomach ... or Liver Qi + Stomach Yin Xu, but without food stagnation. You will see this with the dry vomiting or dry heaves and with projectile vomiting in which there is no retching, just immediate severe vomiting. This is an excess and a deficiency at the same time. This usually occurs in chronic diseases such as late stage of stomach cancer.

   (OK, yeah, it also happens after you drink too much then do a technicolor yawn ... and then have nothing left in your stomach to expel.)

Differential Diagnosis and Treatment

Basic Points

Use these points for any kind of stomach disorder.

- **ST 36**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng download (page 3)
- **Ren 12**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng download (page 4)
- **P 6**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng download (page 4)

Add one of the following. Avoid SP 6 if the patient is pregnant. See discussion in the previous section of this document.

- **SP 6**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng scoop. (page 6)
- **SP 4**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng scoop. (page 4-5)
To descend the Stomach Qi use the following. Remember that points below the umbilicus are more descending and above are more lifting. **ST 25** will do both. Remember the cautions about pregnancy regarding **SP 6** and all points in the lower abdomen!

- **ST 30**
  Useful for rebellious stomach Qi, helps descend.
- **SP 6**
  See [this discussion](#) for the full Zheng Zeng scoop. (page 6)

### Invasion of External Pathogens
This is an excess type of diagnosis for nausea and vomiting. This can be due to damp cold, damp heat, and dampness alone (i.e., stomach flu).

The symptoms are to the left while the treatment principles and points are on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- Acute onset</th>
<th>Remove Dampness (external pathogen), Regulate Middle Jiao</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Damp Sx:</em></td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- N &amp; v with or without food; decreased appetite</td>
<td>Basic points +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Typical Sx of ext invasion:</td>
<td>GB-20; UB-12, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fever, chills, aversion to wind or cold, w/ or w/o sweating, general achy or heaviness</td>
<td>SJ-5, LI-4, LU-7, SP-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Normal, or red tip</td>
<td>C: Thin, white yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Superficial, tight or fast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Food Stagnation
This is also an excess type of nausea/vomiting. In this case there will probably be food stagnation vomiting but perhaps no sound.

The symptoms are to the left while the treatment principles and points are on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Stagnation</th>
<th>Remove Food Yu; Sedate Rebellious Stomach Qi; Regulate Middle Jiao</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Tu type:</em> Food Yu vomit, no sound</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acute onset with history of irregular diet</td>
<td>Basic points +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vomiting with undigested food; sour odor;</td>
<td>ST-21, 34; REN-10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Severe pain or fullness in the abdomen w/ aversion to touch;</td>
<td>UB-20, 21; ST-25, SP-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bm alleviates pain/fullness</td>
<td><em>All with sedation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decreased appetite or aversion to food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Constipation, or stinky diarrhea with undigested food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T: Normal or swollen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Bean curd coating; or greasy thick, rough w/o root</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P: Slippery, forceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Liver overacting upon Stomach
Also called Liver Qi Stagnation or Disharmony of Liver and Stomach. This too is an excess type. This includes motion sickness.

The symptoms are to the left while the treatment principles and points are on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIV→ST / Disharmony of Liver and Stomach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Includes motion sickness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Acute onset with history of emotional disorder
- Nausea or vomiting: acid regurgitation; belching: hiccup
- Vomiting of undigested food or even bile
- Distending sensation in abdomen & hypochondriac
- Irritability, anger; bitter taste in mouth, breast tenderness

T: Normal, or red tip or red sides
C: Thin, white
P: Wiry, or wiry & fast

Regulate LIV & ST by Soothing LIV Qi and Removing LIV Heat

Basic points +
4 gates, GB-41; LIV-13, 2
UB-18, 20, 21

Spleen/Stomach Qi and Yin Xu
This is the only deficiency type. This may very well be the “gan ou” type with vomiting sans food – dry heaves. In chronic diseases, this is really not a good sign. This may arise from the 1st 3 types above because of loss of fluids or due to chronic disease. This can show you the prognosis of a disease.

The symptoms are to the left while the treatment principles and points are on the left.

- Chronic onset; seen in many chronic disease (@ end of stomach cancer…)
- ST Yin is exhausted, no food to vomit, no acid regurgitation
- Dry vomiting off/on, n & v worse at night
- Burning pain or dull pain in gastric area
- Thirsty and dry mouth; constipation; decreased appetite; emaciation
- Yin Xu: palm heat; night sweats; low grade fever

T: Red or scarlet, small and thin, w/ cracks
C: Mirror or matted coat; or chicken heart tongue (no coat in ST area but coat everywhere else)
P: Thin, fast, w/o strength (deep)

Nourish ST yin and Descend rebellious ST Qi

Basic points +
SP-4, 6, 9 (more SP pts as Yin ch to nourish Yin)
UB-20, 21, 43; KID-6; ST-44

Food therapy or herbs is better than acupuncture (pear, watermelon - not OJ)

> Wu Zhi Yin
> Sha Shen Mai Men Dong Tang