

## Evidence summary

# Chinese medicine for psoriasis vulgaris

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This summary of key findings from *Volume 2: Psoriasis vulgaris*<sup>1</sup> of the Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine monograph series outlines:

- what psoriasis vulgaris is
- current treatments
- findings from research into classical Chinese medicine literature and modern Chinese medicine clinical studies.

### What is psoriasis vulgaris?

Psoriasis vulgaris is a common, persistent skin disorder. It is characterised by red skin lesions and patches covered in silver-like scales, affecting anything from a small area to the entire body.<sup>2</sup> The exact cause of psoriasis is unknown, but it is thought to be related to immune system dysfunction.<sup>2</sup>

### Current treatments

Mild-to-moderate cases of psoriasis vulgaris may be treated with topical medicines or phototherapy. Moderate-to-severe cases may be treated with systemic therapies (e.g. retinoids and methotrexate) or biologic immune-modifying agents (e.g. infliximab and bimekizumab).<sup>3, 4</sup>

Chinese medicine treatment options for psoriasis vulgaris include Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture therapies. Chinese medicine practitioners base their treatments on the patient's symptoms, relevant clinical textbooks and guidelines, research and clinical experience.

### Classical Chinese medicine literature

The *Encyclopedia of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Zhong Hua Yi Dian)* is a large and important collection of classical Chinese medicine books. It includes 60 citations that describe the treatment of skin symptoms associated with psoriasis vulgaris using oral and topical Chinese herbal medicine. There are nine citations for acupuncture therapies for treating psoriasis vulgaris.

The Chinese herbal medicine therapies from classical literature are different to those in modern clinical studies, but the acupuncture points are similar.

### Modern Chinese medicine clinical studies

To write the *Psoriasis vulgaris*<sup>1</sup> monograph, nine biomedical databases (five English language and four Chinese language) were searched in May 2013. This search identified 274 clinical studies on Chinese medicine therapies for psoriasis vulgaris, including 103 randomised controlled trials, 18 non-randomised controlled clinical trials and 153 non-controlled studies. An additional search of the International Clinical Trials Registry Platform in May 2022 identified eight new registered randomised controlled trials of Chinese medicine therapies for psoriasis vulgaris.

#### Chinese herbal medicine

##### *Oral Chinese herbal medicine*

Seventy-five randomised controlled trials evaluated the effects of oral Chinese herbal medicine on psoriasis vulgaris. Results showed that oral Chinese herbal medicine was an effective treatment for psoriasis vulgaris, especially when combined with conventional therapies.<sup>5-9</sup>

Mild adverse events were associated with oral Chinese herbal medicine. However, combining oral Chinese herbal medicine with conventional therapies reduced the adverse events of those therapies.

Results from five new registered randomised controlled trials confirmed the efficacy of oral Chinese herbal medicine for treating psoriasis vulgaris.

##### *Topical Chinese herbal medicine*

Twenty-five randomised controlled trials evaluated the effects of topical Chinese herbal medicine on psoriasis vulgaris.<sup>1</sup>

Results showed combining topical Chinese herbal medicine with conventional NB-UVB treatment was more effective than NB-UVB alone, without additional adverse events.<sup>10</sup>

Results from two new registered randomised controlled trials confirmed that topical Chinese herbal medicine ointments were more effective than placebo for treating psoriasis vulgaris.

### Acupuncture and related therapies

The original database search identified two randomised controlled trials that assessed the effect of acupuncture therapies on psoriasis vulgaris.

One trial suggested electro-acupuncture therapy was no different to placebo for treating psoriasis vulgaris. The other trial indicated acupuncture and moxibustion combined were as effective as acitretin for treating psoriasis vulgaris.

In 2021, a new registered randomised controlled trial on moxibustion for psoriasis vulgaris found moxibustion was more effective than topical calcipotriol.

### Key messages

- Chinese medicine treatments have been used throughout history to treat psoriasis vulgaris-related symptoms.
- Oral Chinese herbal medicine is effective for treating psoriasis vulgaris, with mild adverse events.
- Topical Chinese herbal medicine combined with conventional NB-UVB treatment is more effective than NB-UVB treatment alone.
- Moxibustion may be an effective treatment for psoriasis vulgaris.
- Clinicians and patients should discuss potential risks and benefits, so patients can make informed choices about care.

### For more information

You can find out more about Chinese medicine for psoriasis vulgaris in the book *Evidence-based Clinical Chinese Medicine Volume 2: Psoriasis vulgaris*<sup>1</sup> from <https://doi.org/10.1142/9788>

To find out more about Chinese medicine research at the China–Australia International Centre for Chinese Medicine, visit [www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/multi-partner-collaborations/cairccm](http://www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/multi-partner-collaborations/cairccm)

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### Disclaimer

This evidence summary is not intended as a guide for self-medication or medical advice – patients should seek professional advice from qualified Chinese medicine practitioner.