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Review

Endometriosis and Emotional Health: Combining Traditional Chinese Medicine and Modern Supplementation Strategies.

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Abstract

Background: Endometriosis is a chronic, oestrogen-dependent condition characterised by the presence of endometrial tissue outside the uterus, affecting millions of women of reproductive age. Beyond pelvic pain and reproductive dysfunction, it is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and decreased quality of life. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, endometriosis and anxiety are interpreted as manifestations of energetic imbalances involving blood stasis (*Xue Yu*), *Qi* stagnation, and dysfunctions of the Liver, Spleen, Kidneys, and Heart, which disturb the *Shen* and the flow of *Qi*.

Objective: To explore the theoretical and clinical basis for the integrative use of Chinese herbal medicine and Western supplementation in the management of endometriosis, emphasising the interplay between physical and emotional health.

Methods: A narrative review of classical Traditional Chinese Medicine principles and contemporary biomedical studies was conducted. Evidence from clinical trials, systematic reviews, and pharmacological analyses was synthesised to describe the therapeutic mechanisms of Chinese herbal formulas, bioactive compounds, and selected nutritional supplements relevant to endometriosis and anxiety.

Results: Chinese herbal medicine demonstrates anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antiproliferative, and hormone-modulating effects that alleviate pelvic pain, regulate the menstrual cycle, and promote fertility. Classical formulas such as *Si Wu Tang*, *Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan*, and *Jia Wei Xiao Yao Wan* act through blood activation, *Qi* regulation, and *Shen* stabilisation. Bioactive compounds including resveratrol, curcumin, garlic, *Angelica sinensis*, ginseng, and *Salvia miltiorrhiza* provide complementary antioxidant and anxiolytic properties. Additionally, Western supplements such as magnesium bisglycinate, omega-3 fatty acids, B-complex vitamins, 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), and *ashwagandha* may enhance mood regulation, reduce anxiety, and strengthen anti-inflammatory and neuroendocrine responses. Collectively, these therapies offer a multidimensional approach that targets both somatic and emotional symptoms of endometriosis.

Conclusion: Traditional Chinese Medicine, particularly Chinese herbal medicine, provides a personalised and integrative framework capable of addressing the complex interactions between physical and psychological manifestations of endometriosis. When responsibly combined with evidence-based supplementation, this approach may improve pain management, reproductive outcomes, and emotional well-being. Nonetheless, current evidence is limited by small sample sizes and heterogeneous study designs; further randomised controlled trials are required to validate efficacy and safety. The findings support the World Health Organization's call for the responsible integration of traditional and complementary medicine into public health systems, promoting holistic and patient-centred care for women with endometriosis.

Keywords: Endometriosis; Anxiety; Emotional Well-being; Traditional Chinese Medicine; Phytotherapy; Women's Health.

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1. Background

Endometriosis is a chronic disease characterised by the presence of endometrial tissue outside the uterus, affecting millions of women of reproductive age [1]. In addition to severe pelvic pain and reproductive difficulties, the condition is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and reduced quality of life. Studies have shown that high levels of perceived stress are related to pain intensity and disease recurrence, being further aggravated in women undergoing multiple surgeries, whereas some hormonal therapies, such as progestin, may be associated with lower stress levels [2]. Complementarily, reviews highlight that factors such as delayed diagnosis, prognostic uncertainty, and challenges related to conception negatively influence psychological well-being, reinforcing the need to consider mental health in the clinical management of the disease [3].

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, physical and emotional health are intrinsically linked. Both endometriosis and anxiety are interpreted as manifestations of energy imbalances. Endometriosis is seen as a stagnation of blood (*Xue Yu*) and accumulation of dampness in the Lower Heater [4], involving organs such as the Liver, Kidneys, and Spleen.

Emotional instability, in turn, is understood as a result of *Qi* stagnation, blood and *Yin* deficiency, internal heat, and phlegm formation. These imbalances mainly affect the Heart, considered the house of the *Shen* (spirit), and the Liver, which regulates the flow of *Qi*. Moreover, stagnant *Qi*, after some time, generates heat and blood and *Yin* lesions, causing the state of deficiency, potentially leaving the mind agitated and without rest, which contributes to anxiety and sleep disorders [4-8].

The crucial link lies in the role of the Liver. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, this organ is responsible for ensuring the harmonious flow of *Qi* and blood throughout the body, regulating the menstrual cycle and emotions. Negative emotions, such as tension, stress, anger, frustration, or hurt, are pointed out as important causes of Liver *Qi* stagnation [6,7,9]. This stagnation, in turn, aggravates both the physical symptoms of endometriosis, such as intense pain and mass formation, as well as anxious states and emotional changes [10].

2. Chinese Herbal Medicine, supplementation, and medicinal herbs

Chinese herbal medicine, due to its ability to act in a natural and personalised way, emerges as a possible solution to restore internal balance, simultaneously addressing the physical manifestations of endometriosis and the emotional impact of the pathology.

In the case of endometriosis, Chinese herbal medicine demonstrates anti-inflammatory, antiproliferative, and analgesic properties, contributing to the reduction of menstrual pain, reduction of uterine masses, and promotion of fertility [11-13]. According to Li *et al.* [14], *Si Wu Tang* and its modifications have demonstrated significant efficacy in reducing primary dysmenorrhea.

In addition to traditional formulas, several natural compounds (such as resveratrol, curcumin, garlic, *Angelica sinensis*, ginseng, and *Salvia miltiorrhiza*) demonstrate antioxidant, hormonal modulator, and anxiolytic effects, being useful in preventing disease recurrence and improving emotional well-being [15-18]. In the case of anxiety, often associated with endometriosis, phytotherapy uses substances that "calm the spirit" (*An Shen*) and nourish the Heart and Kidneys.

According to available scientific evidence [19-22], Western supplementation with magnesium bisglycinate, omega-3, B-complex vitamins, 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP), and *ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*), when combined with Traditional Chinese Medicine treatments, can improve outcomes in the management of endometriosis, including its impact on emotional health. This integrative approach helps reduce inflammation, promote hormonal balance, regulate the nervous system, and relieve pain, thus providing comprehensive support for women affected by the condition.

In Table 1, the classic Chinese medicine formulas are summarised.

Table 1. Classic Formulas of Chinese Herbal Medicine

Formula	Main Action	Indications
Xue Fu Zhu Yu Wan (血府逐瘀丸) Destasis Form Pills	Invigorates circulation, removes blood stasis, relieves pain	Pelvic pain, uterine masses, menstrual irregularities
Si Wu Pian (四物片) Angel Four Form	Nourishes bleeding, regulates menstrual cycle	Dysmenorrhea, menstrual anaemia, cycle irregularities
Gui Zhi Fu Ling Pian (桂枝茯苓片) Uter Form	Promotes circulation, eliminates stasis	Uterine masses, dysmenorrhea, endometriosis
Tao Hong Si Wu Pian (桃紅四物片) Peach Form	Activates blood, removes stagnation	Chronic pelvic pain, menstrual irregularity
Jia Wei Xiao Yao Wan (加味逍遙丸) Easeplus Form	Harmonises Liver and Spleen, relieves anxiety	Irritability, anxiety, and depression associated with the menstrual cycle
Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan (天王补心丹) Restful Form	Nourishes *Yin*, Blood and *Shen*, calms mind	Chronic insomnia, irritability, prolonged anxiety
An Shen Ding Zhi Wan (安神定志丸) Mind Form	Calms mind, stabilises emotions	Fear, restlessness, anxiety, sleep disturbances
Chai Hu Long Gu Mu Li Tang Pian (柴胡龍骨牡蠣湯片) Bupleurum Calming Form	Regulates Liver *Qi*, Reduces Agitation & Emotional Disturbances	Intense anxiety, mental confusion, fire, sleep disturbances, and stagnation

Table 2 summarises specific supplementation and herbal medicines for endometriosis and mood stabilisation.

Table 2. Supplementation and Complementary Herbal Medicines

Supplement/Compound	Main Action	References
Magnesium bisglycinate	Reduces menstrual cramps and stabilises mood by supporting neuromuscular function	[23]
Omega-3	Anti-inflammatory action, improves depressive symptoms	[24]
Complex B	Supports the nervous system and neurotransmitter synthesis, enhancing mood and energy metabolism	[25]
5-HTP	Precursor of serotonin, reduces anxiety and depressive symptoms	[26]
Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)	Adaptogenic, anxiolytic, and mood-stabilising; reduces stress	[27]
Resveratrol	Antioxidant, hormone modulator, inhibits endometriotic lesions	[15]
Curcuma longa (Curcumin)	Anti-inflammatory, inhibits proliferation of endometriotic cells	[16,28]
Allium sativum (Garlic)	Reduces pelvic pain, dysmenorrhea, and dyspareunia	[17]
Angelica sinensis (*Dong Quai*)	Promotes blood circulation, regulates menstrual disorders	[11]
Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)	Adaptogenic, immunomodulatory, tonic action, may improve vaginal lubrication	[11]
Salvia miltiorrhiza (*Danshen*)	Reduces disease recurrence and enhances pregnancy rates postoperatively, when combined with GnRH-a or letrozole; also antioxidant and anti-inflammatory	[18]

3. Discussion

Endometriosis profoundly impacts women's physical and psychological well-being, leading to chronic pelvic pain, reproductive challenges, and elevated levels of anxiety and depression, all of which compromise quality of life [2,3]. From the perspective of Traditional Chinese Medicine, these manifestations arise from energetic imbalances involving blood stasis and dysfunctions of the Liver, Spleen, Kidneys, and Heart, which disrupt the *Shen* and the harmonious flow of *Qi* [4,9].

Chinese herbal medicine, as part of an integrative therapeutic framework, targets both physical and emotional dimensions of the disorder. Classical formulas and their bioactive constituents (such as resveratrol, curcumin, garlic, *Angelica sinensis*, ginseng, and *Salvia miltiorrhiza*) exhibit well-documented anti-inflammatory, analgesic, hormone-regulating, and anxiolytic properties (Figure 1). Collectively, these mechanisms may alleviate pain, reduce recurrence, and enhance emotional balance in women with endometriosis [11,14-18].

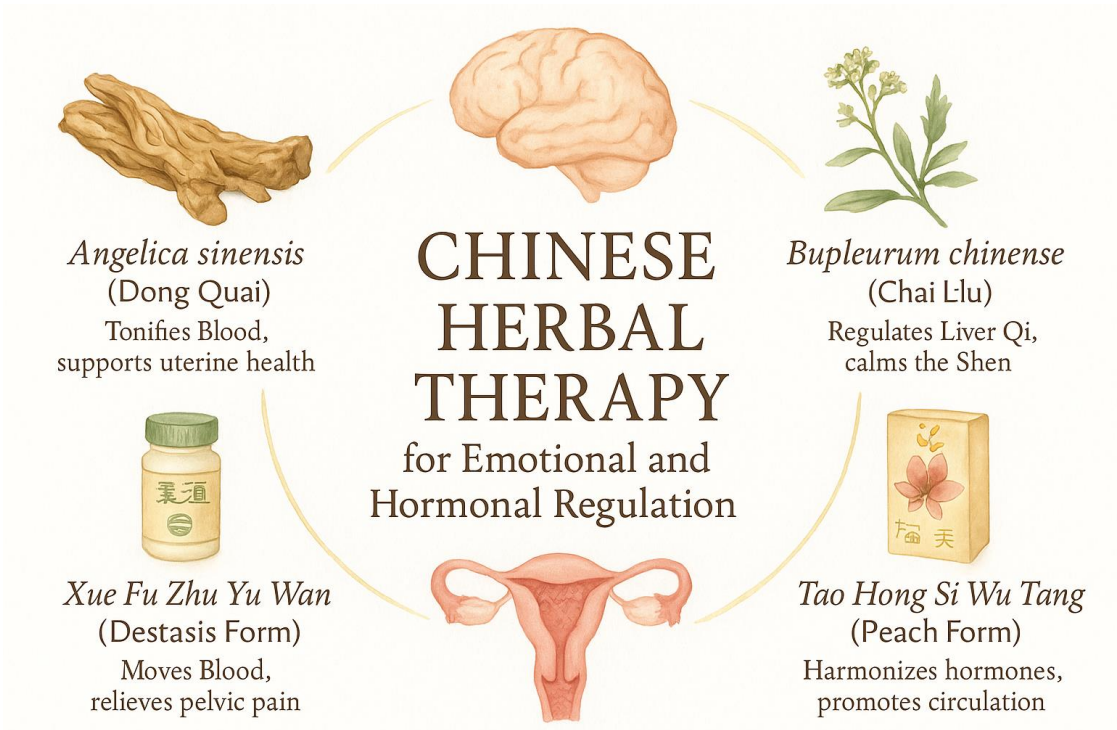


Figure 1. Selected Chinese herbs and their main therapeutic actions related to endometriosis management. Figure by the authors.

Furthermore, nutritional supplements and complementary herbal compounds, including magnesium bisglycinate, omega-3 fatty acids, B-complex vitamins, 5-HTP, and *Withania somnifera*, may potentiate these benefits by modulating neurotransmitter synthesis, stabilising mood, attenuating anxiety, and reinforcing anti-inflammatory responses [23-27]. The integration of these approaches underscores Traditional Chinese Medicine's potential to provide personalised and holistic care, addressing both somatic and emotional aspects of endometriosis.

Despite encouraging findings, the available evidence is constrained by methodological limitations, including small sample sizes, heterogeneous study designs, and a predominance of narrative reviews. Consequently, further large-scale randomised controlled trials are required to determine the comparative efficacy and safety of specific herbal formulas and combined complementary interventions, thereby strengthening the scientific basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine-based integrative management for endometriosis.

In line with the World Health Organization's recommendations for the responsible incorporation of traditional and complementary medicine into health systems [29-32], such

integration holds promise for the development of more comprehensive and patient-centred strategies. By acknowledging endometriosis as a condition that affects both body and mind, Chinese herbal medicine offers a multidimensional therapeutic pathway that promotes not only symptom relief but also emotional well-being and overall quality of life, contributing to a more humanised model of care.

4. Conclusion

Traditional Chinese Medicine, particularly Chinese herbal medicine, provides continuous and individualised care, with formulations tailored to the specific energetic pattern of each patient. This personalisation is fundamental for addressing both the physical manifestations of endometriosis and its emotional consequences, such as anxiety, which often perpetuate a cycle of pain and psychological distress.

Rather than merely suppressing symptoms, phytotherapy in the Traditional Chinese Medicine framework seeks to restore systemic balance, prevent recurrence, and sustain long-term health. When integrated responsibly within comprehensive treatment plans, Chinese herbal medicine may offer women with endometriosis not only pain relief and improved reproductive function, but also enhanced emotional resilience, contributing to overall well-being and quality of life.

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