

# The Complicated Body Field Guide

Five patterns I saw most often in 26 years of clinical practice — the ones that fall through the cracks between conventional and natural medicine, and the ones that have real answers once you know what you are looking at.

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## A note before you read this

This is a pattern recognition guide, not a diagnostic tool. Chinese medicine works by noticing how your body expresses imbalance — not by labeling what you have, but by understanding what is happening. These five patterns often overlap, and most people with complicated bodies recognize themselves in more than one. That is normal. Patterns layer.

*Use this to start a conversation — with yourself, with your practitioners, with the people in your life who keep telling you it is probably just stress.*

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## 01 When things that should be moving — aren't

This shows up in people whose bodies feel stuck — physically, mentally, sometimes emotionally. Movement is supposed to be the body's default. When it isn't, you feel it in very specific ways.

*In Chinese medicine this is called Qi and Blood Stagnation. In Western terms: chronic inflammation, poor circulation, nervous system dysregulation.*

You might recognize this if you notice:

- Fixed pain that doesn't shift, or dull aching that gets worse with rest and better with gentle movement
- Morning stiffness that takes 20 to 45 minutes to work out
- Fatigue that improves — not worsens — with a short walk
- Brain fog, difficulty concentrating, feeling mentally thick
- Dark circles, purplish tinge to lips or under eyes
- Irregular or painful periods, clotting

**What tends to help:** Gentle consistent movement is the most important thing here — even 10 minutes. Warmth matters. Foods that support circulation: turmeric, ginger, beets, dark leafy greens. Emotional patterns of holding things in tend to make this worse — that connection is worth paying attention to.

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## 02 When the deep reserves have been drawn down too far, for too long

This is the pattern of someone who has been running on empty for a long time. Not just tired — the kind of depleted that does not respond to a good night of sleep. It builds slowly and is often mistaken for depression or just aging.

*In Chinese medicine this is called Kidney Yin and Essence Depletion. In Western terms: adrenal dysregulation, thyroid dysfunction, hormonal decline.*

You might recognize this if you notice:

- Fatigue that does NOT improve with rest — bone-tired

- Heat in the palms, soles, or chest — especially at night
- Night sweats, hot flashes, disrupted sleep
- Low back aching, weak knees, ringing in the ears
- Hair thinning, dry skin, low libido
- Taking days to recover from even moderate stress

**What tends to help:** Rest is medicine here — but active rest, not passive scrolling. Nourishing foods: bone broth, black sesame, walnuts, dark beans, eggs. Protecting sleep is non-negotiable. This kind of depletion rebuilds slowly. Herbs can be an important part of this (worth working with a practitioner).

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### 03 When unprocessed stress and emotion are blocking the flow

One of the most common patterns in people navigating perimenopause, chronic stress, or major life transitions. The body and the emotional system are more connected than most of us were taught — and this pattern is the clearest example of that.

*In Chinese medicine this is called Liver Qi Stagnation. In Western terms: sympathetic nervous system overdrive, estrogen metabolism disruption, gut-nervous system dysregulation.*

You might recognize this if you notice:

- Emotional volatility — fine one moment, tearful or rageful the next
- Waking between 1 and 3am with your mind already going
- Sighing frequently — the body's way of trying to release held tension
- Bloating, gas, or digestive irregularity that worsens with stress
- Tension across shoulders and jaw, headaches at the temples
- PMS, breast tenderness, mood changes before periods

**What tends to help:** Movement is the fastest way to shift this — walking, stretching, dancing. Expressing emotion rather than suppressing it matters here, both clinically and personally. Sour foods are supportive: lemon water, apple cider vinegar, fermented foods. Alcohol worsens this pattern more than most people expect.

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### 04 When the digestive and transformation system is overwhelmed

Very common in people with food sensitivities, autoimmune conditions, or years of chronic stress. The gut and the mind run on the same circuit in Chinese medicine — and gut-brain research is catching up to what TCM has observed for centuries.

*In Chinese medicine this is called Spleen Qi Deficiency. In Western terms: gut dysbiosis, blood sugar irregularity, poor nutrient absorption, lymphatic sluggishness.*

You might recognize this if you notice:

- Bloating after meals, especially at lunch
- Loose stools, urgency, or alternating patterns
- Strong cravings for sweets, especially in the afternoon
- Heavy limbs, fluid retention, puffiness
- Overthinking, worry loops, mental fatigue
- Food sensitivities that seem to multiply over time

**What tends to help:** Warm, cooked foods over raw and cold — one of the most consistent TCM dietary principles, and well-supported by gut physiology research. Regular meal times matter more than most people expect. Managing worry is not separate from gut healing — in Chinese medicine, they share the same system.

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## 05 When the body's boundary system has become hypersensitive

This is the pattern of a body that reacts to things other people do not notice. It is often the most frustrating to navigate because the triggers are variable, the reactions feel disproportionate, and it is easy for both practitioners and the people around you to minimize what is happening.

*In Chinese medicine this is called Defensive Qi (Wei Qi) Dysregulation. In Western terms: immune dysregulation, mast cell activation, autoimmunity, hypersensitivity responses.*

You might recognize this if you notice:

- Reactions to things that do not bother other people — foods, scents, fabrics, environments
- Getting sick frequently, or taking much longer than normal to recover
- Skin reactions: flushing, hives, rashes without clear cause
- Feeling easily overwhelmed by sensory input — noise, crowds, bright light
- Joint pain that moves around without a clear structural explanation
- Flares that seem to come from nowhere

**What tends to help:** Reducing total load — on every system simultaneously — is the core approach. This pattern often layers with others (especially patterns 1 and 2) and responds slowly to piecemeal efforts. Nervous system regulation is foundational. This is the pattern most likely to benefit from both conventional medicine and integrative support working together.

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## What to do with this

If you recognized yourself clearly in one pattern — start there. One area, one small consistent change. That is how Chinese medicine works. Not a 30-day overhaul. A shift.

If you recognized yourself in three or four — that is a complicated body, and it benefits from a practitioner who understands how these patterns interact. Not a protocol. A picture of you, specifically.

## Ready to go deeper?

New videos every week on YouTube: practical, clinical, no supplement stack required. Book a free 15-minute call if you would like to work together directly. All links at [practicalnaturalwellness.com](https://practicalnaturalwellness.com)

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