

Editorial

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 The first week back in clinic after new year saw me chewing the winter cud with a patient whose Christmas had been ruined by a seasonal bug that had left her exhausted, overflowing with phlegm and running to the loo with diarrhoea. In the south-west of the UK where I live it had rained pretty much solidly for a month from mid December, resulting in the worst floods that many could remember. A proper damp squib. The year before in January 2023 we had witnessed a brave soul make the best of that winter's flooding by taking his windsurfer out across the fields that are normally full of sheep. This year the waters were even higher. Everyone knows the UK is wet, but it seems to be getting wetter. That morning I had listened with horror to a report on BBC Radio 4 about substandard social housing that focused on the death of a poor child from mould. It included an interview with a mother who recounted how she had to brush mould off her family's pillows, duvets and clothes on a daily basis.

Back to the patient. Her illness was clearly a damp-cold pathogen - slimy tongue coat, muzzy head, fatigue, loose bowels - unsurprising given the squelchy qi abounding in the environment. Of course I gave her herbs and acupuncture, and advised her to get moving as soon as she felt able - work her muscles to get the water coursing through her waterlogged earth, go easy on the dairy and sweet food and reduce the two litres of water she felt compelled to drink every day. All this to help the waters subside. So far, so Chinese medicine. 'What can I do to avoid getting ill like this in future?' she asked. I pondered on what she might do to help her situation. The Bedouins have their sweet mint tea and the Scandinavians have their saunas, vodka and rolling in the snow, but where, I wondered, is the folk knowledge - the grandma wisdom built up over the millennia - to protect the Brits from the seasonal onslaught of dampness? We have plenty of generic health advice ('Early to bed, early to rise, makes a (wo)man healthy, wealthy and wise' etc), but I struggled to think of accessible strategies from traditional culture that would be personally protective of damp qi when it arrives in a deluge. My mind cast back to how life must have been for our ancestors before damp-proofed homes and central heating. How did people survive in the infernal wet? The mould must have bloomed unfettered. Or maybe our microbiomes were better suited back then (prior to antibiotics, Cheesestrings and supermarket bread) to processing damp qi. An internet search provided a possible answer: 'Houses were too ruddy cold to grow mould!'



Charming. Presumably the yang of a lot of fire was essential, perhaps with warming alcohol, spices (if available?) and pungent fumigation. No doubt there were wise women-of-the-woods who could make skilful use of plants from ponds and wet ditches (although of course we killed most of our traditional herbalists as witches). Still, dampness and mould must have consumed many. No wonder *The Last of Us* gave us such a collective shiver.* Nature is pretty tame in the UK in general, but our damp qi can be just as deadly, in its own silent and insidious yin way, as the yang apex predators of more exotic countries. 

*In which humanity is zombified by a mutation of Cordyceps fungus (required viewing in southwest England).