

Expert Advice-Treatment of Cold and Flu in Traditional Chinese Medicine(TCM):

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Defeating Cold and Flu with Chinese Medicine

We are most vulnerable to colds and influenza during the long winter. Many people suffer not only from the respiratory symptoms of cold and flu, but can also fall victim to various complications of these diseases, some of which can be serious. Children, the elderly, and people with chronic illness or compromised immune systems are especially prone to complications. Parents worry about their children bringing home infections from school. Right now, the best way Western medicine has of dealing with these diseases is the widespread use of flu shots, which encourage the immune system to "gear up" for the most prevalent type of flu. However, while flu shots can avert the most serious consequences of infection, they cannot prevent or cure the common cold.

The common cold is an acute viral infection that generally causes inflammation of the upper respiratory tract. It is the most common infectious disease in humans, and accounts for more time lost from work or school than any other disease. Flu is an acute and contagious infection of the respiratory tract. Its symptoms include running nose, cough, chills, headache, fever, and severe aching in the muscles and joints. Although flu affects all age groups, schoolchildren have the highest incidence. Although colds and flu are generally of brief duration, they can lead to complications in the very young, the elderly, and those with chronic diseases or compromised immune systems.

Because both cold and flu are viral infections, conventional medicine has no cure for them. Bed rest and increased fluid intake are generally suggested to make the patient more comfortable. Aspirin, nasal decongestants, and other medications such as steam inhalation, acetaminophen, ibuprofen, naproxen, amantadine, or rimantadine are prescribed.

A friend of mine traveled to China last winter. She told me that when she visited a college there, she saw every student in the cafeteria drinking a kind of herbal tea for the prevention of cold and flu before their lunch. She thought that was very interesting and asked me what they were drinking. I told her that every school in China, from grade school through college, offers herbs to the students during the flu season to prevent cold and flu. There are quite a few teas and herbal formulas available for prevention purposes.

In China, these anti-cold and flu formulas will be found in every family's medicine cabinet. It would be almost impossible to find a person in China who has never taken one. Most of these effective and time-tested herbal formulas come from two important schools in traditional Chinese medicine: the school of cold-induced febrile diseases, represented by Zhang Zhongjing (150-219 AD), and the school of seasonal febrile diseases, represented by Wu Jutong (1758-1836).

Using herbal formulas to prevent and treat colds and flu is one of the best-developed and most successful aspects of traditional Chinese medicine. Specific treatment practices and formulas have been handed down unbroken from the earliest schools to the modern universities of China. In this country, more and more people are becoming aware of the existence and efficacy of the ancient cold and flu formulas. At our clinic, TCM Health Center, we see increased demand for this type of treatment, especially among school teachers, who are constantly being exposed to colds. Our clients say that their doctors have been surprised by the effectiveness of *Cold & Flu Formula* (Yin Qiao San), which is a common and popular formula in China.

Top Antiviral Herbs in Chinese Medicine

Woad Root (Ban Lan Gen) is one of the leading anti-viral herbs. In a study of over 11,000 people who were exposed to mumps, the infectious manifestation was forestalled by using a decoction of woad root. Woad root tea is the most popular herbal tea to prevent and treat flu in China.

Woad Leaf (Da Qing Ye) shares similar properties with woad root. In a study of 100 people, only 10% of the treatment group that took a woad leaf decoction twice daily had upper respiratory infections during the study period, while 24% of the control group had infections.

Forsythia Fruit (Lian Qiao) is a pointed, oval-shaped capsule with a hard shell. Because of its anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and immunity-enhancing properties, forsythia fruit is widely used to treat common cold, influenza, swelling and pain in the throat, and skin inflammation.

Honeysuckle Flower (Jin Yin Hua) is named "gold-and-silver flower" in Chinese. Research indicates that this flower bud can deactivate the PR8 strain of influenza virus. The study also indicates that honeysuckle works wonderfully to treat other infectious diseases, including pneumonia and viral conjunctivitis.

Baical Skullcap Root (Huang Qin) is the dried root of scutellaria. It is an anti-viral agent, effective against influenza viruses. This herb and its active substance, baicalin, are used in the treatment of upper respiratory infections, either bacterial or viral.

Effective Herbal Formulas in Chinese Medicine

In traditional Chinese medicine, patterns are differentiated according to the imbalances of the body and the causes and stages of the disease. Herbal formulas (combinations of herbs) are always recommended by practitioners because they are stronger and more effective than single herbs. I will discuss three patterns of cold and flu symptoms, and the appropriate formulas for each type.

Wind-Heat Pattern: Symptoms of the Wind-Heat pattern include: fever; headache; sweating; a running nose with yellowish-colored mucus; dry mouth; thirst; sore throat; productive coughing with thick yellowish phlegm; a thin, yellow tongue coating; and a floating and rapid pulse. *Cold and Flu Formula* (Yin Qiao San) is the most popular herbal formula to treat the Wind-Heat pattern. *Wind-Heat Clearing* (Sang Ju Yin) and *Lung Heat Clearing* (Ma Xing Shi Gan Tang) are also basic formulas for cold and flu of the Wind-Heat pattern.

Cold & Flu Formula (Yin Qiao San)

Forsythia (Lian Qiao)
Honeysuckle (Jin Yin Hua)
Platycodon (Jie Geng)
Mint (Bo He)
Bamboo Leaf (Dan Zhu Ye)
Licorice (Gan Cao)
Schizonepeta (Jing Jie)
Soy Bean (Dan Dou Gu)
Arctium (Niu Bang Zi)

Wind-Cold Pattern: Symptoms of Wind-Cold pattern include: aversion to cold; mild fever; absence of sweat; chest congestion; sneezing; running nose with clear mucus; itching throat, or a cough with clear mucus; a thin, white tongue coating; and a tight pulse. *Wind-Cold Formula* (Jiu Wei Qiang Huo Tang) is commonly used for cold and flu of the Wind-Cold type. Among others, *Cinnamon Decoction* (Gui Zhi Tang), *Minor Blue Dragon Decoction* (Xiao Qing Long Tang), and *Cnidium and Tea Formula* (Chuan Qiong Cha Tiao San) are also widely used.

Wind-Cold Formula (Jiu Wei Qiang Huo Tang)

Notopterygium (Qiang Huo)
Ledebouriella (Fang Feng)
Cang Zhu (Atractylodes)
Asari (Xi Xin)
Cnidium (Chuan Qiong)
Dahurian Angelica (Bai Zhi)
Rehmania (Shen Di Huang)
Skullcap (Huang Qin)
Licorice (Gan Cao)

Deficiency Pattern: Most people with chronic illness fall into the Deficiency category. They are the targets of cold and flu during every seasonal change and in every flu season. Their energy is low, their immune systems are weak, and they have trouble recovering from prolonged illness. Women with a Deficiency condition often catch a cold before every menstrual cycle. When Deficiency-pattern people are hit by cold or flu, they should use either *Cold & Flu Formula* or *Wind-Cold Formula*, depending upon whether their illness falls into the Wind-Heat type or the Wind-Cold type. Once cold or flu symptoms are gone, other formulas can be taken to strengthen the immune system and prevent recurrence of disease. *Immunenergy* (Shi Quan Da Bu Wan) is a well-known tonic for the immune system. *Chi Spleen Tonic* (Bu Zhong Yi Qi Wan), *Spleen Heart Tonic* (Gui Pi Wan), *Kidney Yin Tonic* (Liu Wei Di Huang Wan) and *Kidney Yang Tonic* (Jin Gui Shen Qi Wan) are also popular formulas which tonify the immune system. Consult a Chinese medicine practitioner to determine the best formula for you.

Immunenergy Formula (Shi Quan Da Bu Tang)

Angelica (Dang Gui)
Cnidium (Chuan Qiong)

Peony (Bai Shao)
Rehmannia (Shu Di Huang)
Ginseng (Ren Shen)
Atractylodes (Bai Zhu)
Poria (Fu Ling)
Licorice (Gan Cao)
Astragalus (Huang Qi)
Cinnamon (Rou Gui)